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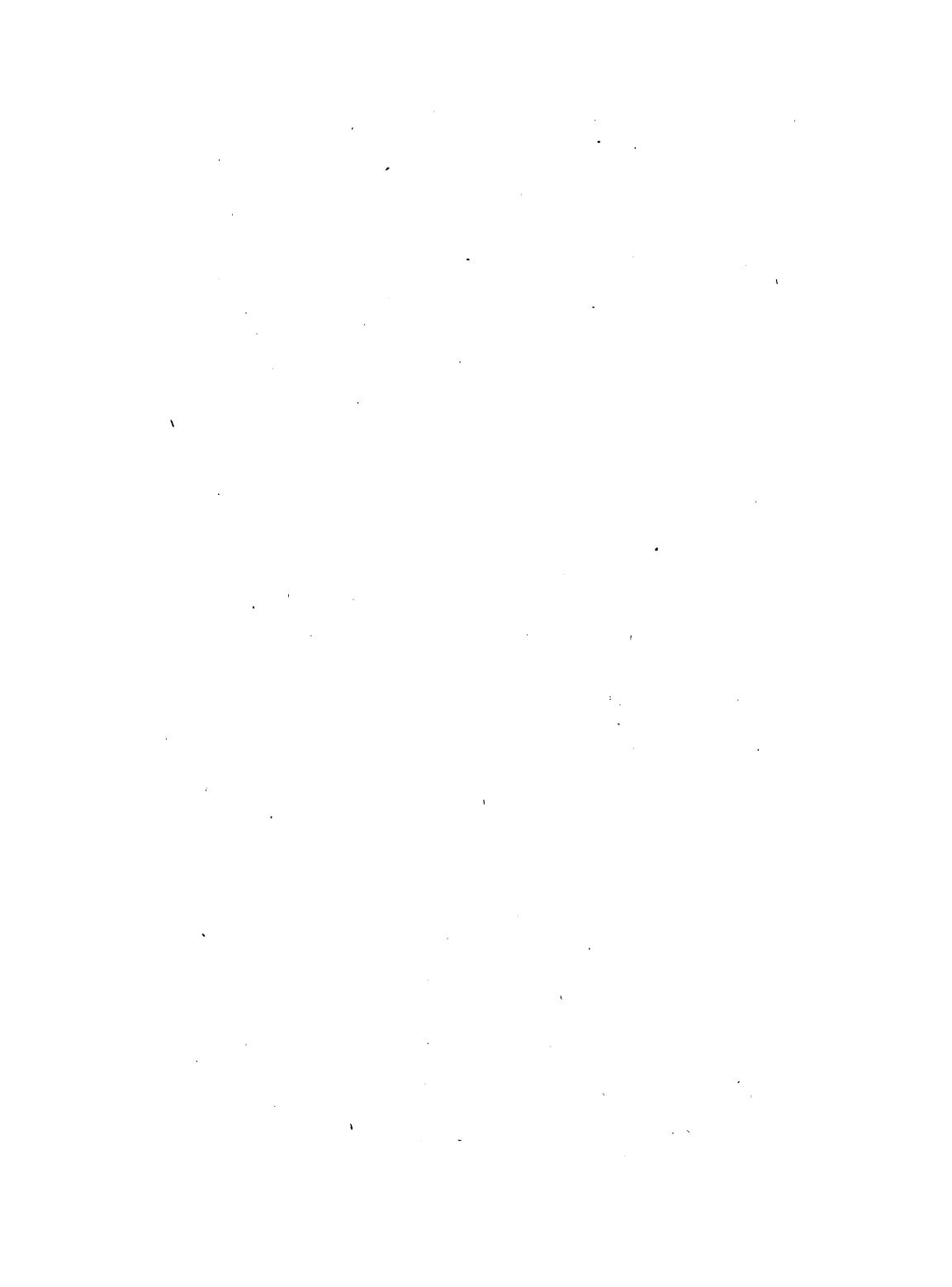
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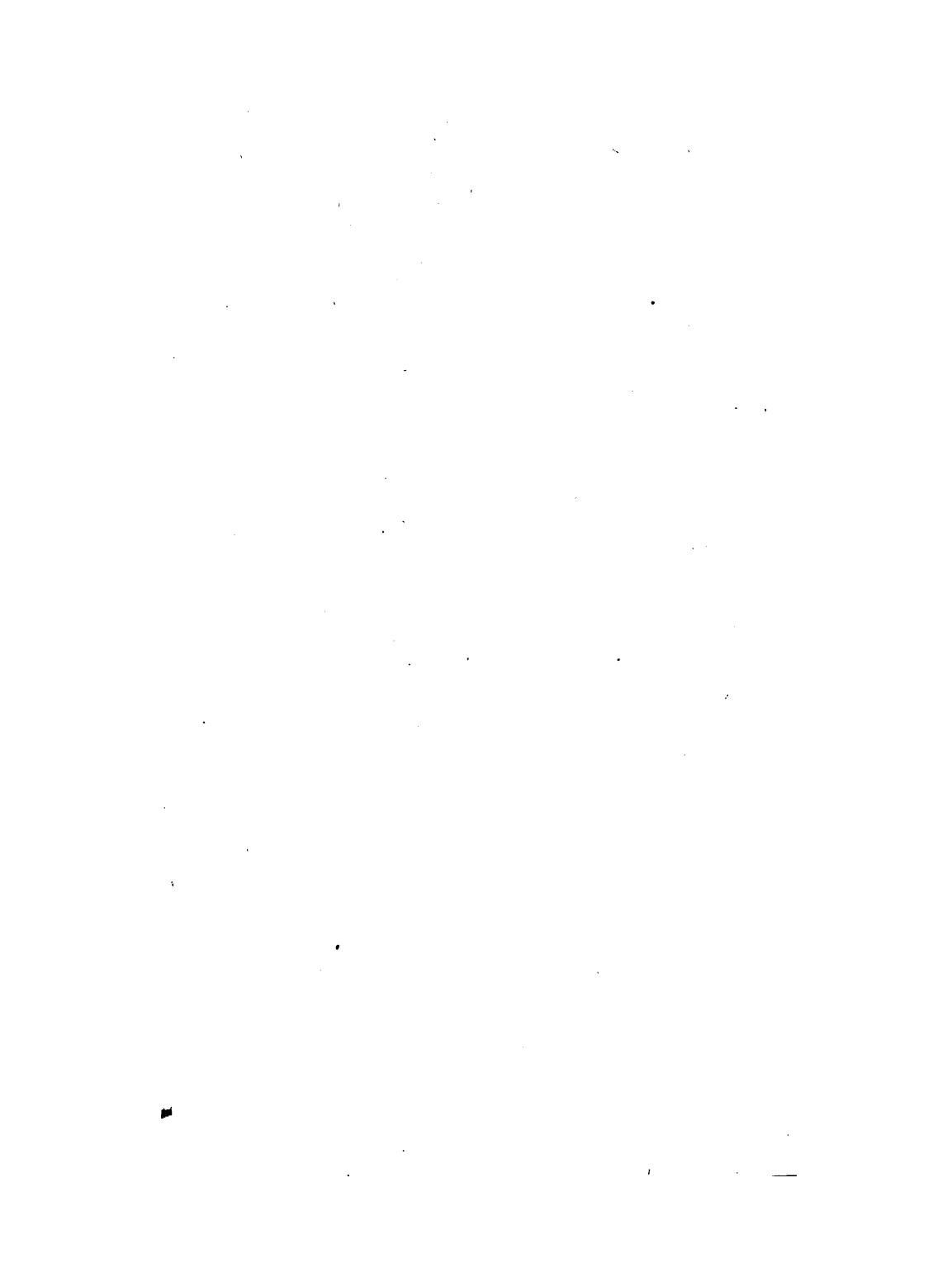
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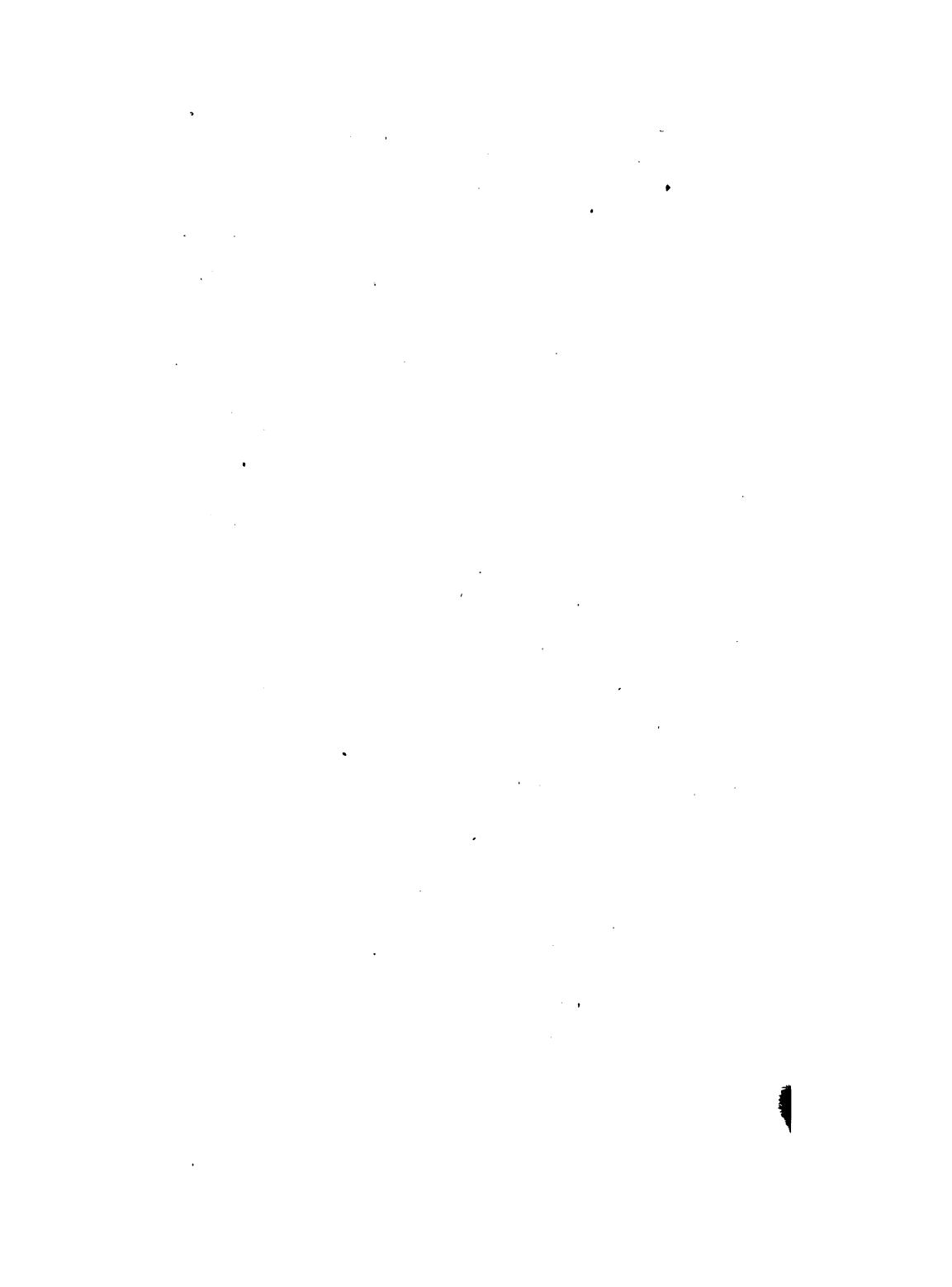
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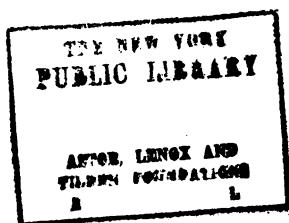




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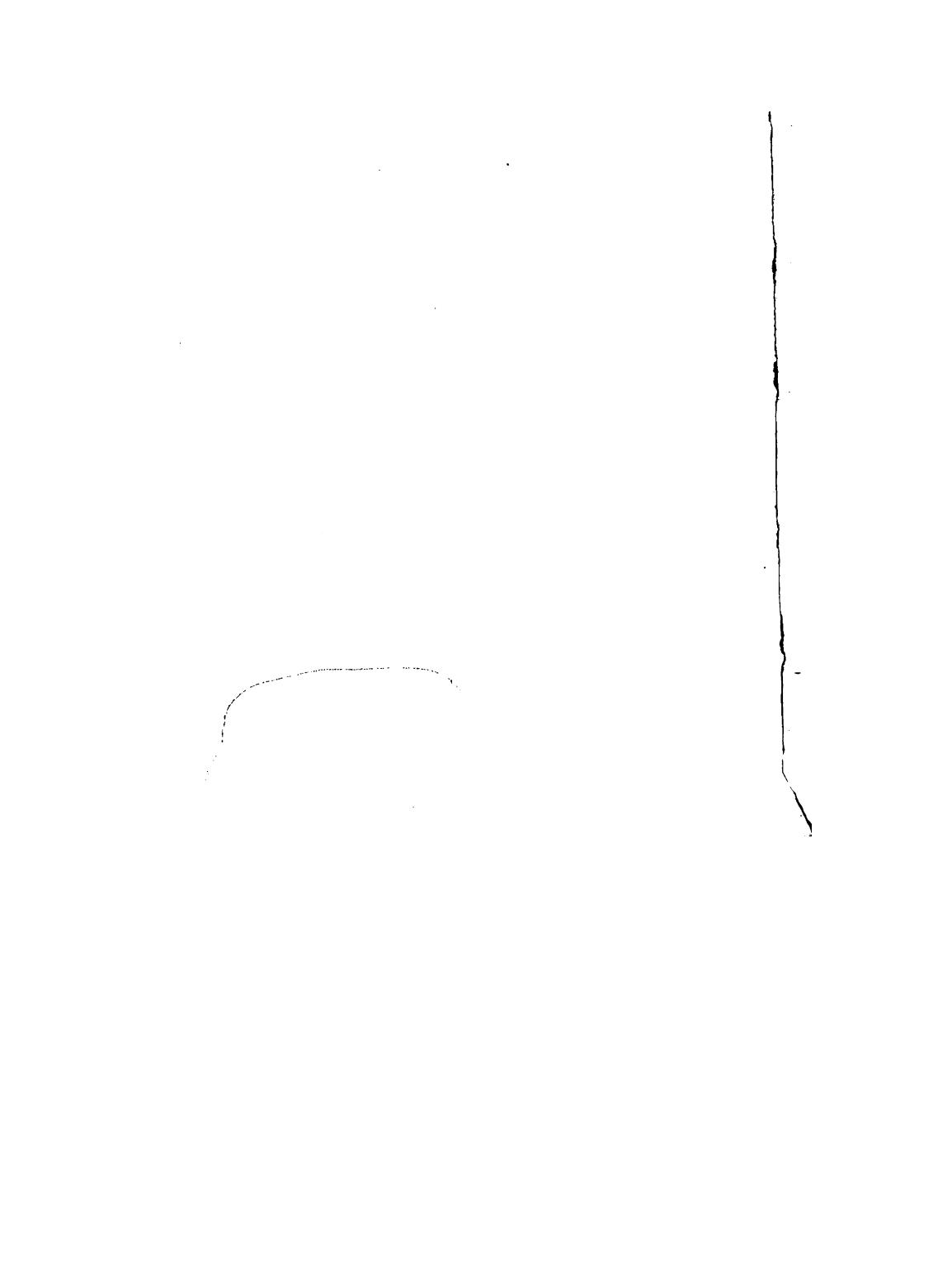
DEDICATION

TO A CERTAIN FAMILY.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

I dedicate this little book to you partly because you have shown much interest in its creation, partly because in the contemplation of your home life the cynical are rebuked, and the disappointed take fresh courage.

It is incumbent on a mere human being to have a fixed place of residence ; as I do not wish my neighbours to be tempted to discover among themselves the originals of my characters, nor the world at large to fasten upon anyone place the imputation of being Doddersfield or Nenford, I prefer to remain anonymous. It is enough for me that you know who I am, and also know, that—to parody Alphonse Daudet—there is a little bit of Doddersfield in every place.



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CHAPTER I.

M R S. G R A N G E.

THE Reverend Moulton Grange was considered in that part of Northamptonshire in which he resided, to have taken the seriously erroneous step of having married beneath him, and the event had been made the subject of much feminine indignation, and not unfrequent condolence even in adjacent counties. Thirty-three years of married life had not sufficed to wipe away the stain, or to mitigate the abhorrence with which "that woman" was mentioned at rare intervals in the houses of neighbouring squires. The enormity of her existence was visited upon her daughters, in a less degree upon her sons, and the family

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was rigorously excluded from that inner circle of pure-blooded distinctions, who ruled the roast in all the festivities of the county. Mrs. Grange had had the misfortune to be connected with trade, and it was even darkly whispered that her brother kept a draper's shop in a large town in the north of England. Things could not have been worse in the mind of Northamptonshire had he sold cats' meat in the streets of London.

Mr. Grange himself was unexceptionable : he belonged to a family which had owned property in the same locality for a thousand years without ever producing a single individual of marked ability in any department of life except fox-hunting ; to this accomplishment, in the present century, had been added an exceptional aptitude for wielding a cricket bat. Hence his matrimonial misfortune. No man can play a cricket match by himself. It is happily possible to hunt, and even to rat with other young men without marrying their sisters ; the interval between a man's groom or his keeper and himself is clearly understood on both sides. Familiar intercourse with such as these involves no obliteration of social

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distinctions; but cricket is another matter. Young men play cricket who are as good-looking, as well-educated, and as well-mannered as the sons of country squires, but who have no other claim to an exalted social position; not being aware of their own disabilities, they go to the same public schools with the scions of the county aristocracy; they even invite these young gentlemen to stay with them at their own homes, and take part in the matches of the annual "week" of their own localities; and the young men usually accept the invitation; most undesirable intimacies arise.

It was in this way that the Reverend Moulton Grange was caught by Miss Louisa Longstaff, somewhere about the year eighteen hundred and thirty.

Of her family the less said the better: for they were tanners in the neighbourhood of Leicester.

"What a mercy Moulton is only the younger son!" exclaimed an agonized aunt. "How thankful we all ought to be that dear Sharde-loes does not play cricket!"

In the course of time Mrs. Grange became

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reconciled to the contemptuous toleration with which she was treated by her husband's relations ; she had not been married many years before she also became conscious of the necessity of exerting a similar forbearance towards himself.

She was better mannered, better read, better moraled than her husband ; being a woman of sound feeling and clear intellect, when she woke up one morning to the discovery that she had bound herself for life to a boor, she took the determination to bear her yoke creditably.

In this she had perfectly succeeded. In spite of occasional fits of clumsy jealousy on his part, she had contrived to get the work which he neglected done in the parish ; she had instituted a flourishing village school, in which more was taught than the three R.'s ; so that Mrs. Grange's girls were sought for as domestic servants throughout the county ; hence she not unfrequently had the pleasure of deepening the abasement of social leaders, who condescended to make use of her services in providing an efficient housemaid, or even cook, while rigorously excluding her from the

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circle of their intimate acquaintance. Even the best of us indulge in revenge now and then, and Mrs. Grange's retributions were not of a specially diabolical nature.

In the course of time Mr. Grange reverted more and more from the clerical to the farming type, a proclivity which found its opportunity in the large glebe attached to his living, which he worked himself with disastrous results to his income. Mrs. Grange was too wise to interfere; she knew that a country gentleman without a hobby is a lost animal. She could think of none cheaper than the farm, dreading the alternative of fox-hunting.

One evening the rector's wife received a letter from her brother of the abominable shop; he had business in the immediate neighbourhood, and would be glad to see her again. She at once wrote and asked him to stay with her for a few days; she did not previously consult her husband, as that would have encouraged him to manifest opinions. Confronted with the accomplished fact, he could be relied upon to behave decently, not having sufficient initiative to do otherwise.

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Besides, he owed Mr. Longstaff no small sum of money.

Mrs. Grange looked forward with pleasant anticipations to her brother's visit ; she occasionally stayed with him in the town in which he resided, and where he understood how to introduce "my sister, Mrs. Grange, of Northamptonshire," at civic banquets to the best advantage ; it was a pleasant change to her to converse with a man of active mind and healthy imagination. Brother and sister understood one another thoroughly, and showed it by never mutually communicating their opinion of Mr. Grange and his kindred. On the present occasion Mrs. Grange had a special reason for wishing to see her brother : the village carpenter had a grown-up son of unusual intelligence, who wished to go out into the world ; he had exhausted the resources of Mrs. Grange's evening school, and shown in so many respects what was felt to be an understanding above his station, that she hoped a berth might be found for him in her brother's business.

The visitor arrived in due course, and was welcomed by his brother-in-law with an

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effusive heartiness intended to put the shop-keeper at his ease. Clown though he was, Mr. Grange instinctively understood the shades of social distinction, and forbore to waste on his wife's brother the dignified reserve that he would have accorded to a duke. He had just returned from the farm, wearing a long frock coat, once black now green; for the levity of a tweed suit, though more suitable to his agricultural occupations, had never beguiled him; in his mind the Church of England and its doctrines were vaguely based upon broadcloth, even when of an antiquity more evident than venerable.

The few days which Mr. Longstaff passed with his sister were spent as such days are; the visitor went to bed each night surprised to find the day so quickly gone, and yet dreading the boredom of the morrow. He observed that his sister was happy in a ceaseless round of small occupations, and that his nieces were qualifying for the holy estate of matrimony by doing nothing whatever. James Howson proved on inspection to be more capable than Mr. Longstaff had anticipated.

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pated, and even than he had been represented ; he joyfully accepted an exceptionally good offer of thirty pounds a year, with board and lodging. In a few days he followed Mr. Longstaff to Doddersfield.

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CHAPTER II.

MR. MILLER.

"Doddersfield, June 15th, 18—.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"Though this is the holy sabbath I am forced to commit a sin, and break it; for in the week days I have no time, when I can write to you. All the week I have been thinking of you and good Mr. and Mrs. Grange and Miss Annabella. The tears are flowing from my eyes now. I shall always love you, dear friend, and soon I shall have saved enough to ask you to come here, and be my wife; for except our clothes, and they cost little, we have nothing to spend upon ourselves; all is found. We live in rooms over the shop, twenty of us together. You would never believe the splendid place it is; there is a bath with brass cocks, and hot and cold water turned on just like at the hall. We each have a room to ourselves, and there is a smoking

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room, were we all meet and talk after the shop closes, but unless Mr. Miller is there I do not like to go, for the conversation does not tend to edifying, as the blessed Apostle says. I am to do clerk's work at first, but if I get on, and am not timid, I shall soon, Mr. Miller says, be put behind the counter like a gentleman. Mr. Miller is very kind to me, and took me to his church this morning, and to the Sunday school in the afternoon ; we are to go to the service again in the evening, of which I am glad, for my heart is full of thankfulness ; and oh, Eliza, if only you were with me, I should be quite happy. Give my love to all my dear friends, and believe me,

“ Your very true friend,

“ JAMES HOWSON.”

The recipient of the above letter was Eliza Turrell, under housemaid at the Rectory. She showed it to all her fellow servants, and even to Miss Annabella. The house was suffused with a pleasing confidence in the rewards with which the manifold merits of James seemed to have met ; and Eliza set about the consideration of her trousseau without delay. She

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and James had kept company in an easy-going sort of way, ever since she had been installed at Mrs. Grange's; an occasional kiss behind the door, when James was leaving Miss Annabella's evening drawing-class, elevated the connection to the regions of passion, but the intimacy, like everything else connected with Mrs. Grange's parochial arrangements, was so well regulated as to be an accepted and acceptable institution in the establishment. "James had something to keep him steady, and Eliza had something to look forward to." So said the old nurse, an authority of much weight in the household.

Mr. Miller had taken James under his wing at once; he was a middle-aged man, used to complimentary allusions. Mr. Longstaff used to say "my right-hand man, Mr. Miller;" at social parochial gatherings the Vicar of St. Faith's would speak of him as "our invaluable friend, Mr. Miller." "What should we do without Mr. Miller?" the Vicar's wife remarked, unrolling draperies at a mother's meeting. Whereupon a curate sniffed; but Mr. Miller could afford to be sniffed at by a curate. Did he not control the issue of Mr. Longstaff's rem-

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nants? and was he not competent to furnish forth the whole stock-in-trade of a bazaar? Had he not friends in every shop in Doddersfield? and did he not maintain a permanent succession of virtuous young men in Mr. Longstaff's establishment? Incomparable Mr. Miller!

He was not married! Sighed for, he had been. There were indeed ladies who had surprised themselves in the act of discovering a certain hopefulness even in widowhood, as Mr. Miller passed the window, or handed round the plate in church. Comforts, and a competency had however failed to lure him from the position of guardian angel to Mr. Longstaff's establishment, of guide and director to his young men. In fact, he loved power, and the daily exercise of it armed him against the seductions of that compromise between opposing forces called matrimony. So the widows sighed in vain, while the maidens, instinctively divining the tyrant, forbore to blandish.

James Howson had not been many hours at Mr. Longstaff's before he had been interviewed by the great Miller; the interview took place in his own room, when he was

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going to bed ; the rules of the establishment were explained to him, not only the written laws of outgoing and incoming, but the traditional observances expected of Longstaff's young men. Had James been blessed with any experience he would have discerned in the system a hierarchical arrangement calculated to exalt the personality, which formed the apex of a pyramid of young men ; and that apex was Miller. You could hardly wash your hands in that establishment without somehow deferring to Miller.

And yet this autocrat of the biggest drapery and general business in Doddersfield was not happy ; the respected, the indispensable, the feared, the worshipped, envied Mr. Miller, was consumed by a secret care, or rather tortured by a gnawing ambition. Beneath that business-like alert exterior, veiled under the clear tones of that directing voice, lurking inside that Sunday broadcloth was the bitterness of a disappointment, the fire of a resolve.

Mr. Miller wanted to be a churchwarden. Everything else he had been ; sidesman, lay-reader, Sunday-school teacher ; he had drilled Bands of Hope, worked magic-lanterns for

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missionaries, thumped on the big drum of the Church Army, waited at tea drinkings innumerable ; but when on the occurrence of a vacancy he had intimated to the Vicar that he would accept his nomination, he had been politely thanked, and given to understand, that in his position it was impossible. He was not a householder ; there was a certain incongruity in a Vicar's churchwarden living in a room over a shop. Since then Miller had resolved to qualify, and to qualify with a vengeance. He formed a scheme ; when James Howson arrived at Doddersfield he had already been nursing this scheme for two years : and in furtherance of that very scheme, he was unusually attentive to James.

It is very wrong, and in every respect contrary to the copy-book, but it is a sad fact that the path of life is apt to be made smoother for those young persons whose appearance is attractive, than for the less well-favoured kind. James was a serious looking lad, there was a touch of the heaviness of the south-country peasant about him, something in the set of the chin, and the cheek bones, in the length of the upper lip, that left no doubt of

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his peasant blood, but he had a clear complexion, large bright blue eyes, and curling golden hair; Eliza Turrell had been wont to remark: "Lor! James, what a beautiful 'ead of 'air you 'ave to be sure," and James could reply, "'Ave I, Lizzy?" and nothing more would be said for some time. In fact, there was nothing more to say.

Now, Mr. Miller, though he did not know it, was quite as susceptible to the charms of a crop of waving curls as Eliza herself, and he had hardly set eyes upon James, before he had fitted him very neatly into a comfortable corner of the great scheme; and was therefore more than usually careful in his inquiries into the precise condition of the religious convictions of the new-comer, and of the spiritual advantages which he had hitherto enjoyed. Simple James learned to his astonishment that the parochial institutions of Nenford were not so perfect as he had imagined them to be; he had never seen any incongruity in the combination of the agricultural with the pastoral in good Mr. Grange, but Mr. Miller did, and he was absolutely startled by the shake of that gentleman's head, when he

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informed him that he had been chiefly prepared for confirmation by Miss Annabella. Mrs. Grange, too, his best friend, was dismissed by Mr. Miller, who had seen her once on a visit to her brother, as an affable lady, but worldly. Poor James further became quite despondent, when he was convicted of not knowing that a collection was the same thing as an offertory, and had committed the indiscretion of inquiring, whether brass instruments were acceptable in a Band of Hope. He was himself a proficient on the euphonium.

"Yes, Howson," Mr. Miller ended up : "Yes—I see you have been sadly neglected, but we will do our best, my boy, to put you in a better way ; I shall take you to church with me to-morrow, and as you say you sing, we will see if something cannot be done about getting you into the choir. Mr. Longstaff likes to see his employés earnest in the work of the Church, and with your head of hair, you should make a presentable appearance in a surplice, like David—yes—like David, whose mother used to bring him a linen ephod every year to the Tabernacle, when he danced before the ark ; and now, good night ! Oh—by the

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way, you might go downstairs, and fetch me my spectacles, I left them on the mantelpiece in the smoking-room. What, no slippers! dear me, this will never do—you will be waking the whole house up, if you go about in those heavy boots at night, slip them off before you go downstairs. And remember in all difficulties and doubts you can safely apply to me; perhaps a little advance on your quarter's salary would be a convenience? No! ah well—if you have reason to change your mind later on, you have only to say so. Be careful how you go downstairs in the dark."

Thus ended James Howson's first private interview with the tutelary deity, who presided over the virtues of Mr. Longstaff's young men.

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CHAPTER III.

MRS. ARMBRUSTER-SMITH.

ON the outskirts of Doddersfield lived Mrs. Armbruster-Smith. Her house was handsome and commodious ; her garden extensive and picturesque ; the undefiled Dodder flowed through on its way to the town ; her personal proportions were ample, and her charities on the same scale ; her religious experience was nearly complete ; she had never been a Jew, Turk, or Roman Catholic, or consciously an infidel, but she had strayed into and out of nearly every fold known to Whitaker. In the course of her devotional perambulations she had wandered into St. Faith's, and been welcomed as an acquisition. The clergy of Doddersfield had tacitly agreed to share Mrs. Armbruster-Smith between them, and to make hay in turn, while the sunshine of her favours lasted. She was a good giver, an excellent organizer, and if there were those who said

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that it was owing to her irrepressible energy that she was a widow, the evidence rested merely on the word of her late husband.

This dear departed was known to have pleaded with the family physician ; to have urged him to send his wife to Samoa or Mount Cook ; he represented that she wanted a holiday. The physician shook his head, he saw no symptoms of weakness of the chest or other vital organs in Mrs. Armbruster-Smith. "Well," said Mr. Smith, "if she does not want a holiday, I do. Last week I had to attend a charity ball, a bazaar, the Infirmary meeting, the Dispensary meeting, to ladle soup at three very hot soup kitchens, amuse a Board School children's picnic in the garden, tea them, and show them a magic lantern after dark, then I had to make a fool of myself as a waxwork, and entertain a missionary afterwards till two o'clock in the morning. She'll never let me go away by myself ; she'll make a virtue of nursing me all day and night, if I say I am ill, so there's nothing for it but to send her away. Invent something that requires perfect solitude, and for God's sake give me a rest. If you don't

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I shall die, I know I shall." The physician smiled—and Armbruster-Smith died. His wife remained. No galleon running on the Cornish coast ever gave more satisfaction to the natives than her appearance in a congregation to the clergy. The Vicar of St. Faith's had no sooner clapped eyes on her, than he planned a bazaar, theatricals, Band-of-Hope fireworks, and a jumble sale ; all to be brought off at the earliest possible date, before the widow should have time to cool.

In the train of Mrs. Armbruster-Smith walked her four daughters ; they wore broad-brimmed straw hats of simple form, and broad green ribbons hung down from them behind ; in summer they were clad in suitable muslin, in winter they wore grey cloth, their serviceable boots were rather too apparent beneath their crinolines. Secretly they cherished a grudge against mamma, whose ample trappings were in the best and most recent fashion known to Doddersfield ; but she had views about what was suitable ; and apparently expensive clothing was unsuitable for them. They promenaded the streets of

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Doddersfield, and marched up the aisles of its places of worship an advertisement of Christian humility, while their mother swept on before like the purple-seller of Thyatira. Few young ladies have ever worked so hard as they did; while their mother found the money, and the organization for charitable enterprises, they sewed the flannel under-garments, cut the bread and butter, cast up the accounts, wrote the notes of invitation, distributed magazines and tracts, tied up parcels, read to old women; the sporting department of the great temperance battle was closed to them: it was their mother who pulled drunkards out of public-houses, while they made blue ribbon rosettes at home. A demure glance at a curate was the only dissipation they ever allowed themselves.

The entrance of such a family into a church was naturally an event, and the Vicar cast about him for something sensational to add to his sermon. The widow was known to aver a predilection for striking opinions, and to despise the commonplace.

One person only in that congregation viewed with mixed feelings the entry of Mrs.

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Armbruster-Smith ; it was not Mr. Miller, who was used to speak of her as "my esteemed patroness," and had once seriously thought of seceding from St. Faith's, and joining a small community of Christians who objected to be otherwise designated, upon whom she was at that time shedding her favours ; but before he had made up his mind, she had quarrelled with the sect on the question of the preaching of women, and so he had remained where he was. It was not the other ladies of the congregation, for they saw in her a possible deliverer. It was, naturally, the Vicar's wife.

There have been found men who have superfluously inquired why it is that women are so fond of marrying parsons. The answer is a very simple one. In no other trade or profession, except small shop-keeping, do man and wife work together. Were a barrister's wife to appear in his chambers, and assist at consultations, his clients would suspect her or his ignorance of the law ; not even doctors, who receive patients in their own houses, admit their wives to the surgery, but the parson's wife is everywhere except in

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the pulpit ; though there is indeed nothing to prevent her from writing the sermon should she be so disposed. Hence a properly constituted parson's wife, and the Vicar of St. Faith's was lucky in the possession of this particular blessing, does not look with too kindly an eye upon the intrusion of a Mrs. Armbruster-Smith into the parish, and prudently determines, metaphorically, to pick her bones, suck out the marrow, and then send her packing. Thus the eye which Mrs. Fullblaster-Ffoulke turned on the portly widow was a meditative eye, an exploitative, possibly predatory, but not a genial eye ; and while her husband was sonorously jumbling his reminiscences of Archdeacon Farrar's sermons with those of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, blending the flowery and the humorous in a style which used successfully to startle Doddersfield, fill his church, and swell his offertories ; while the Vicar was preaching, the Vicaress was pondering upon the methods by which Mrs. Armbruster-Smith could be both robbed and annihilated ; or as she put it in her own mind, "made use of without being allowed to feel herself too important."

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This was the first occasion on which James Howson sang in the choir, and as the third Miss Armbruster-Smith looked at his clustering curls, she sighed a gentle guilty hope that some day he might become a curate.

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CHAPTER IV.

APPRENTICESHIP.

BEWILDERED by the surpassing merits of his fellow townsmen, the municipal Englishman of to-day thinks disparagingly of country-folk, and credits them with a Galilean incapacity for producing anything good ; he forgets that the country existed before the towns, and that the towns are continually recruited from the country ; it is possible that an inquiry into the antecedents of the leading citizens even of glorious municipalities like Jarrow and Bolton-le-Moors might bring to light numerous cases of recent country extraction. Therefore let no man wonder at the rapid elevation of our friend James Howson : if he had died after a year's time from his first introduction to Mr. Longstaff's establishment, Mr. Miller would have given orders that the words "respected by his employers" should be engraved upon his

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tombstone ; and he might with equal veracity have added, "beloved by his colleagues." If it can justly be imputed to Northamptonshire villagers, that they are "dull of understanding," the reason is a very simple one ; those that are quick, exchange village life for scenes in which their abilities will have sufficient scope ; the residue is just what can tolerate its environment ; and none so brutish after all.

James had one great advantage over Mr. Longstaff's other young men, he was docile. To them Longstaff's was only one of many establishments where a screw might be earned ; they did their work to avoid being sent away before it was convenient to go. They were, outwardly at any rate, steady, because if they were not, they had to reckon with Mr. Miller ; but to James the shop was a palace, Doddersfield an El Dorado, Mr. Miller merely a continuation of a training process to which he was already broken. His imaginative faculty helped him to endure the drudgery of acquiring the most prosaic of accomplishments. At Nenford he had been held to have too great a conceit of himself, and in abandoning the

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trade to which he had been brought up was considered to be inviting that fall which so comfortably waits upon the pride of our neighbours ; but at Doddersfield other young men were disposed to think lightly of his meanness of spirit, till an unexpected display of pugilistic dexterity rendered open comment in this strain infrequent, and imposed a revision of judgment in James's favour ; in the end, his simple faith in himself and his work was accepted by his comrades as part of a personality that they liked ; and Mr. Miller daily congratulated himself upon the popularity of his chosen disciple.

His manner to customers, Mr. Miller said, could not be improved. The Doddersfield young man was rather given to independence, he knew the past history of most of the ladies of the town ; had watched their rise from back streets, and a general servant, to substantial houses in the suburbs ; he felt himself as good as they, and was not inclined to conceal his sentiments. James had been brought up to do reverence to Lady Brock, and as these women wore the same clothes, treated them with the same deference. In a very short

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time he had learned the art of appearing to make a special bargain with each individual customer, and of lowering prices purely out of personal consideration. It was owing entirely to his seductions that Mrs. Armbruster-Smith bought the sage-green velvet for the evening costumes of her daughters. With customers of a humbler class he was no less successful, and seemed to have an intuitive perception of the precise caricature of last year's fashions which would tempt the spinners' wives to bedizen their children. "He is a first-class seller is Howson," Mr. Miller informed the cashier, and the cashier condescended to inquire further into James's origin and capacity; as a rule he objected to "Miller's lambs."

Mr. Longstaff, too, wishing to please his sister, on hearing these favourable reports, gave directions that James was to be instructed in the whole routine of the business. It was not long before he had mastered the mysteries of bookkeeping, a science whose immeasurable profundity kindles the imagination of the British parent, and had become a proficient both in single and double entry.

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In due course he was promoted to be a buyer, and again Mr. Miller joyfully noted the instinct with which he gave orders not for what was good, but for what was saleable.

Alongside with this rapid initiation into worldly affairs marched the deepening of James's spiritual life, still under the direction of Mr. Miller; the Vicar of St. Faith's even hinted to him that he should take orders, and held out hopes of a curacy. But there was a difficulty about ways and means, and an experimental lesson or two demonstrated that a genius for double-entry is compatible with an idiotic imbecility in dealing with Greek. "I was never so much disappointed in my life," said the Vicar; "why the man's partly deficient! and yet he reads well, very well, and is practically intelligent far above the average. It is a great pity, a sad pity; why he might be earning a hundred a year in no time!" "You forget what he is, my dear," replied his lady, "anybody can learn to calculate, but it takes some generations to make a scholar." "Well, I shall put it before the bishop whether Greek, and Latin too, for that matter, cannot be dispensed with; the Church

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is losing most valuable men, most valuable, and the Methodists snap them up. It's most unpractical." "Well, my dear, if I were you I should let it alone; curates are cheap enough, thank heaven! Did you notice how that Emma Smith—I never will call them Armbruster—looked at Mr. Howson when he was handing the tea on Wednesday. She could not take her eyes off him."

"What nonsense you talk, my dear," said the Rector, reddening. "You women see a love affair everywhere. Why the thing's out of the question!"

"What's out of the question?"

"Well, young Howson can't marry a Miss Armbruster-Smith."

"Nobody said he was going to marry her—how you take one up; but she's none the less in love with him for all that; and, as I have said before, Theophilus, you should be more careful in the way you bring these young people of different classes together."

"Yes, there you go with your old social superstitions. I can't arrange like a spinster aunt, can I, for every parochial entertainment? The girls must take care of them-

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selves. Perhaps you would like me to give up the teas altogether!"

"Oh, no, certainly not—they are most profitable; but still you might be a little more careful, and"—

The Vicar fell suddenly asleep.

Meanwhile Eliza Turrell was languishing at Nenford. James's letters, at first weekly, became gradually less frequent, and less affectionate, till on receiving one which opened with the words, "Madam, your esteemed favour" (a piece of forgetfulness on the part of business-like James), Eliza burst into loud and piteous howls: "Can this be love," she cried, holding out the document to Miss Annabella, whom the unwonted noise had summoned: "Tell me, can this be love?" and that experienced damsel answered "No."

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CHAPTER V.

ST. FAITH'S.

THE Reverend Theophilus Fullblaster Ffoulke was one of nature's clergymen. No matter in what age he had happened to be born he would still have pontificated. To guide the virtuous leanings of his fellow men ; to be the channel through which their charities flowed, to be the organizer of their strivings after human and humanitarian perfectibility, was as much part of him as his hair, his eyes, his teeth, or his integument. He might have been a Protagoras at Athens, a Crispinus at Rome, conducted the mysteries of Isis at Alexandria, or cut mistletoe with the Druids ; he might have persecuted with Bonner, or suffered with Cranmer, but he could not have been anywhere without being a clergyman. Happy he was in that being temporally located in the nineteenth century he was also geographically located in England ; in the

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England of to-day. Under no other conditions could he have united the push of the demagogue with the saintliness of the apostle, the respectability of the priest with the zeal of the reformer, advanced democratic ideals under the dignified wing of an aristocratic establishment.

St. Faith's was a model parish as worked by the Rev. T. F. Ffoulke—ardent curates came from distant parts of England to see how he organized, and went away determined to do likewise. “The Parish must be all in all,” he said, “and everything must be part of the Parish.” There were parochial kitchens, parochial bakehouses, parochial teas, parochial excursions, parochial baths, parochial everything, except breweries.

There was no excuse in St. Faith's for spending an evening by one's own fireside; if you were not lecturing, you were being lectured to; had you a taste for acting, there was the Parish Entertainment Club training its youthful Irvings and beardless Toolies; if you could sing, you had to sing, and pretty frequently too; the least accomplished could, at any rate, manipulate the slides of a magic-

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lantern. Was your intellect inadequate even for this, you could help on the work in the Parish Football Club, the Parish Cricket Club, the Parish Trap and Ball Association, or the Parish Gymnasium. An energetic curate even got together, and kept in working order for at least a month, a Parish Soap-bubble Society for amusing the little children of the very poor on wet afternoons.

And there was no withstanding the Vicar, he buttonholed you in your shop, in the presence of your employés ; he attacked you in tramcars, where there were plenty of people before whom you did not care to appear luke-warm ; he suborned the wife of your affections, the daughters of your tenderness ; he beguiled you by the most virtuous of your weaknesses, by your parental pride, by your wish to do no worse than your neighbours, by your loyalty to your church and its congregation. It was no use to forbid him your door, some day you would return weary from business to find him chatting with your wife in your nice warm study, and it was all up with you. Once captured you were never released. It was a terrific system of ecclesiastical brigandage ; the

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only way to escape was to pay a heavy ransom in the form of subscriptions.

Elderly inhabitants of Doddersfield used to complain that no domestic institution was respected except family prayers; even the sacred Sunday afternoon nap being burst in upon by energetic daughters in search of Bibles, or information suitable for Sunday Schools.

James Howson, accustomed to look to the Rectory and the Rector and the Rector's wife at Nenford as his natural guides, fell into line with this system at once; and the more readily that whereas at Nenford the distinction was sharply drawn between principalities and powers and the rest of the parish, at St. Faith's an energetic young man with a voice, and beautiful curly hair was somebody to be made much of; Mr. Miller and his young friend were consulted, they did not merely do as they were bid. James's euphonium, for instance, proved to be the nucleus of a parochial brass band which marched at the head of school treats, and enlivened the soberness of temperance festivities. James was treasurer of the institution.

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“ Mr. Howson, shall we able to count on your invaluable assistance at the parade of the Band of Hope on Tuesday ? ” the Vicar would say—and Mr. Howson blushed a ready assent. Soon he was on the Committee of the Cricket Club, and a junior officer in the Boy’s Brigade ; the Vicar used to beam upon him, when he commented on the parable of the talents at the Sunday School. Hence it was not without a pang that James one afternoon accepted an invitation from the chief cashier to spend a Sunday evening with him ; the chief cashier was a native of Northampton, he knew Nenford well, and was anxious to be civil to a fellow-countryman.

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CHAPTER VI.

A HOME.

JAMES was rather dismayed to find, that, when he communicated to Mr. Miller the fact that he had received and accepted an invitation from Mr. Walton, and that he should not be able to attend evening church as usual, he was at once in the position of a school-boy, who has asked leave off. Miller stared, reddened, wiped his spectacles, took a pinch of snuff, sneezed elaborately, and then said : “ Well, well, I suppose you must go ; it is not advisable, perhaps, to refuse in the present instance, and it is not for me to say anything against Walton ; but—in short—I would not be too intimate there ; Walton is a good fellow, a very good fellow, and attends to his duties in the business admirably ; but at home, I fear, he is sadly irregular ; I am informed that he seldom attends any place of worship ; and

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they do say that he plays cricket with his boys on Sunday afternoon ; he has no idea of parental responsibilities, none whatever ; and in short, you won't mind my saying so, having thrown in your lot with St. Faith's, you must stick to it ; there is competition in this, as in every other line of business ; and if you are not regular, somebody else will soon drop into your place. Mr. Walton is a fellow-countryman of yours, I think ; ah, well ! just for once in a way, there'll be no harm in visiting there —but not too often—not too often, on any account." Permission having been thus graciously accorded James excused himself from his duties at Sunday School, and started on his walk to the cashier's residence. His heart was firm to resist temptation, and he hummed the evening's anthem as he walked along the road, regretting the opportunity that a tenor lead would have given him.

The way to Mr. Walton's lay past the house of Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, and James felt strangely uncomfortable as he saw the young ladies ascending the gravel drive on their way from Sunday School. With the Miss Smiths were two curates, pleasantly relaxing, and

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James vowed never again to neglect his duty on Sunday afternoon.

A quarter of an hour later he arrived in rather a stiff humour at the turning up to Dodder Cottage, and there was Walton leaning over the gate and waiting for him. All the rigour of his Nenford training, intensified by Miller and St. Faith's, revolted in James's breast at the godless spectacle. Walton was wearing a white felt hat, a suit of Harris tweed, whose pattern would have been glaring in a chess-board, knickerbockers, and a dog-whip ; a pipe was in his mouth ; around him panted four or five terriers of various breeds, and in one hand he held a recently defunct rabbit.

"There you are," said Walton, holding out the dog-whip hand ; "just in time to be too late ; we've had no end of a run ; ah, you little rascal ! let go, will you ?" and he proceeded to use the dog-whip effectively upon the person of an immature dandy, who had succeeded in leaping high enough to get hold of the rabbit. James stood by, in his tall hat and gloves, monumentally shocked ; had Mr. Miller not in some measure prepared him, he would undoubtedly have turned and fled. But he had no time for

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amazement; horror succeeded horror; before he had recovered from the first shock, three little boys came from somewhere out of the shrubs dragging with them a lady in gardening gloves, who carried a rake; "Mother, mother, you must come and see; such a big rabbit; a regular whollopper, father says; and Tike got it; good old Tike. I saw it first, in the cabbage bed: there it was, sitting so still, chewing, chewing away; and I got father, and he got the dogs, and the rabbit went through the hedge, and out we ran by the gate, and Tike got it in a moment, mother; but I had it from Tike before Teddy and Jack could get up, or father, either." Then there ensued universal clamour; Teddy and Jack had their own views about the accuracy of this account, and while the conflicting statements were being submitted to the arbitration of father, Mrs. Walton, after a reproachful "Tom, how could you! I *am* ashamed," recognized the visitor, pulled off the gardening gloves, and shook hands with him as if he were the one person in the world that she had been waiting to see. "I have so often wished to meet you;" she said, "I come from close

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to Nenford, my father used to live at Cold Arbor—you know his farm! but Tom said you were sure to be busy on Sundays; now you are come, you will tell me all about the old place, won't you? First of all you must go round the garden with Tom, he won't be happy unless you do, and then we'll go in and have tea; perhaps you won't mind being left alone with my husband, while I go to church; and then we can have a good chat over supper, after the boys have gone to bed."

With these words she called to the two smaller boys, and went into the house, while Walton asked James to come and help him put the dogs away; meanwhile Billy proudly marched to the kitchen by the back way, bearing the rabbit, and looking forward to an uninterrupted recital of the afternoon's adventure free from brotherly comments.

The garden of Dodder Cottage was not very extensive, but it was very well filled, and the most had been made of a small tributary of the Dodder which passed through one end of it. "My wife's fernery," said Tom, pointing to a cleverly contrived bit of rock-work, whose luxuriant vegetation was kept

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damp with the spray from a small water-fall, and everywhere in the little domain Mrs. Walton's special appropriation was indicated as the reason for some particular charm in arrangement, some unusual luxuriance in the vegetation, or brilliance in the blossoms.

The husband's department consisted entirely of pets, from the trim, strong pony who grunted recognition, and muzzled for bread in his master's pockets, to an insidious raven, who, while pretending to be engaged in striving to recall the most effective phrases in his repertoire, made a sudden vicious dab at James's shiny boots. The cashier thought it a good thing for the boys, he said, to be brought up used to animals, and he certainly gave them every facility, James's country instincts woke up in him, and he gradually unbent, inquired into the pedigree of the dogs, and recounted the prodigies that had been worked by Mr. Grange's old pony. By tea-time he had quite forgotten Mr. Miller and St. Faith's; he was surprised into a recollection of them by Mrs. Walton's quietly rising and asking to be excused, because she was going to church. "I will not ask you to

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come with me," she said ; "in the first place Tom wants to talk to you, and, in the second, you would find our service rather dull after Mr. Ffoulke ; I go to the Bede Chapel ; you will have to excuse Tom for half an hour while he puts the boys to bed ; I shall be in by supper time. Tom, you won't forget the salad ?" And so, kissing her husband, and promising to tuck the little boys up when she came back, Mrs. Walton went to church by herself.

Next after the exiguity of an offertory, the neglect of evening church-going most stirred the indignant eloquence of Mr. Ffoulke ; bitterly contemptuous were his denunciations of those easy-going sheep, who knew the flock only in the morning, who reduced their devotions to the scale of their contributions, whose attendance at God's house was the silver threepenny of observance, the smallest offering compatible with respectability ; while as to those hardened sinners, who allowed their solitary wives to represent the religious aspirations of the family, he questioned whether there was any sense of the word Christian which could be held to apply to

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them. Honest James therefore was naturally disturbed at the godless character of the household into which he had dropped from the pure atmosphere of St. Faith's, and remembering his responsibility for the soul of his brother, and the duty of being urgent in season and out of season, was on the point of putting some awakening questions to his host, when the little boys came clambering round their father, imploring him to come and see if there was not another rabbit in the cabbage-garden ; Teddie had looked out through the attic window, and was quite sure he had seen the ears of a large one in the fourth row from the end ; prompt investigation proved that Teddie was imaginative, and then, as the evening was rather raw, Mr. Walton suggested that they should all go in, and that Mr. Howson should read them a story till bedtime. " You will not mind being under-nursemaid for half an hour, I hope," said the cashier, " I have to be head nurse on Sunday evenings." " Yes, and it's awfully jolly," said all the little boys at once, " he lets us do lots of things that mother won't ; once we took off our shoes and stockings,

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and plodged in the burn; and another time . . .”

“Go along and fetch the books, Billie,” hastily interrupted papa, and they all went into the cosy little drawing-room, which looked over the mansion of Mrs. Armbruster-Smith down the valley of the Dodder to the west.

James prided himself on his reading, and especially on his reading of the Scriptures; his conscience had been seriously disturbed by the unrighteous doings of the evening up to this point, and he welcomed this opportunity of at once sanctifying his conduct, and making himself felt; but when they were all settled, and the books produced, Billie thrust into his hand, not a copy of the Bible, nor even of “Pilgrim’s Progress,” but “Uncle Remus,” and loudly demanded the adventures of Brer Rabbit with Miss Meadows and the Gals. James reddened, he opened the book, and looked into it; his eyes were confronted by a picture of Brer Rabbit dancing in the moonlight, and he could no longer hope that he held in his hands a moving tract dealing with the sufferings of our black brother; he

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passed on the book to his host: "you must excuse me," he said, "I am not in the habit of reading this kind of book, and . . ." he stammered for a moment, ". . . least of all on a Sunday." Billie looked at him, wide-eyed, and then handed on the volume to his father, who at once proceeded to the marvellous encounter of Brer Rabbit with the Tar baby; the little boys listened breathless, though they already knew the story by heart, while James wondered how long this impious tomfoolery was going to last, and half expected to suffer the fate of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram along with the rest of this abominable household. At Nenford Rectory all books were carefully put away on Saturday evening, periodicals which arrived on that day were placed under lock and key till Monday morning, and the Sunday post-bag was left unopened; periodically Mr. Grange read a sermon dealing with the hideous wickedness of works of fiction; and there was some excuse for him, as his own acquaintance with the world of romance-writers was limited to the ingenious inventor of Jorrocks.

At last, bedtime was declared, and Mr.

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Walton invited his guest to come and see the boys' room ; he was rather proud of his dormitory, he said ; and he had reason to be.

The largest room in the house had been arranged for this purpose ; so large that there was plenty of room for some gymnastic apparatus without interfering with the three little iron beds, the three baths, the three everything that the little boys could require. The room was wainscotted with varnished deal ; there was no carpet, no curtains, no paper on the walls. "This room is a little bit my hobby," said Tom, seating himself, and making a sign to his guest to do the same ; "you must see these rascals at their exercises."

The little boys stripped, and went through some simple evolutions with the gymnastic apparatus for a few minutes ; then each washed, put on his sleeping clothes, came and said his prayers at his father's knee, was kissed, and put to bed. "I don't quite like you," said Billie, as he shook hands with James, "but you are very nice to look at ; I hope you will come again and see us play cricket."

"You should send those little fellows to our Boy's Brigade," said James, on returning

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to the drawing-room ; " we have a first-rate instructor, and of course we could do so much for them, our gymnasium is quite complete. One of the curates has the supervision ; we begin with prayers, and there is always a short address after the exercises."

"Perhaps I should," said Walton, smiling ; "but you had better speak to my wife about it. I don't think she quite approves of your doings at St. Faith's, and when you are married, you will know that, what your wife doesn't approve of, isn't done."

"Not approve of St. Faith's !" burst out James. "Why——;" but at this moment Mrs. Walton entered, and before long supper began.

There was no time to discuss the merits of St. Faith's at supper ; Mrs. Walton had so much to ask about old friends at Nenford. She remembered Mrs. Grange well ; asked if Mr. Grange still played cricket, spoke of his handsomeness as a young man ; at which her husband looked comical ; confessed to sharing the view that he had thrown himself away in the matter of marriage : Mr. Walton gravely shook his head ; and then they all laughed

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together. The happiness of these people was contagious ; even James's stiffness melted, and he soon found himself laughing and talking in a most unsabbatical fashion. He forgot St. Faith's ; he forgot the Sunday School ; he forgot the Boys' Brigade ; he forgot Mrs. Armbruster-Smith ; and he had even forgotten Mr. Miller, when his host said : " By the way, I suppose it will not be long before you leave us ? " " Leave whom ? " said James, suddenly remembering that he had stayed longer than he intended.

" Why, Longstaff's," said Tom, in some surprise.

" Leave Longstaff's ! " ejaculated James.

" Oh, I see, Miller has said nothing to you ; perhaps I have been indiscreet. However, you will hear in a few days ; meanwhile, forget what I have said, in case you should hear nothing more of it."

" That's just like my husband," said Mrs. Walton ; " there never was such a gossip, always talking about other people's affairs, and never tired of abusing the tongues of the ladies ; and yet, if a thing is not to be let out, he is the first to reveal it."

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Tom looked rather sheepish. The clock struck ten ; and James had already broken the rules of Longstaff's. He rose hurriedly, and excused himself. "Come again soon," said Mrs. Walton, bidding him good-bye ; "at least, if you can put up with our irregular Sunday ; you see, it is my husband's only chance of getting to be with his boys, and I am obliged to let him have his own way, even though I don't altogether approve."

James expressed his gratitude for a very pleasant afternoon, and departed.

"I'm afraid our young friend is a bit of a prig," said Tom. "So were you once," replied his wife. "But then I saw you, and got converted," laughed Walton ; and as his eyes rested for a moment on his wife, there shone in them that light which is worth a king's ransom.

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CHAPTER VII.

GOLDEN PROSPECTS.

MR. MILLER was up when the belated James returned to Longstaff's, and admitted the truant in person. He shook his head gravely, but a smile was on his lips, and his manner was benign ; James felt that he had been treasonably employed, and reproached himself with ingratitude to Miller. His self-abasement was redoubled when the injured one began :

"I have been sitting up for you, lad ; I have something that I particularly wish to say to you." "Now it's coming," thought James, and immediately felt less guilty.

Mr. Miller led the way to his own private apartments, and correctly surmising that James was thirsty, produced a bottle of ginger ale and glasses. Then he went to a knee-hole writing table and unlocked a drawer, from which he drew an object wrapped in silver

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paper ; this object proved to be a morocco leather case about the size of an ordinary cabinet photograph. "He is going to get married at last," thought James, and blushed, delighted at being the first recipient of so important a confidence. But James was wrong. The case on being opened disclosed, not the portrait of such a lady as would be worthy of Mr. Miller, but an apparently silver shield, to which sundry ribbons were attached.

"What do you think of that?" said Mr. Miller, as he placed the resplendent object in James's reverential palm. James did not know what to think of it. "What is it?" he asked.

"That is a badge of a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Faith," said Mr. Miller.

James examined the shield more carefully, and distinguished engraved upon its surface something like the arms of the City of London ; only in this the cross was impaled upon two swords crossed saltire, and the shield was supported by two ladders. A wreathed crown surmounted the whole in the position of a crest, and below, on a ribbon, floated the motto, "Fides infidelibus fida." "Faith

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faithful to the faithless,'" explained Mr. Miller, " or, as I prefer it, and I think there's a better run about it, 'Truth to the truthless true ;' for, whatever the Latin may mean, the untruthful man can't get rid of the truth, and so I told Mr. Ffoulke. He says it means that Faith is faithful to the infidel, for however much he may deny, and struggle, and shut his eyes, and shoot his arrows at the true believer, the faith is always there to confute him, and reason with him, and bring him back, and pour contempt upon him in spite of his uprisings."

" But what's it for ?" asked James.

" Well," said Mr. Miller, " there's several of the congregation have noticed that zeal is not what it used to be ; worldly pleasures have taken the place of church service on Sunday evenings ; Sunday School teachers are irregular in their attendance, and those that should set an example and be a shining light—those on whom the seal seemed to have been set—are turned aside after their own amusements. We feel that the Church wants stimulating ; parochial institutions are on the wane, and as the crown of martyrdom

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is not what it was in happier times, and buffettings, doubtless for some wise purpose, are withheld, I—some of us—suggested that we would do well to take a leaf from the example of the Primrose League, and institute an order of our own connected with our own church, and our own work, so that the more zealous among us could wear badges. So there is to be established the most honourable order of St. Faith, and that will be my badge and sash as the first Knight Commander. Mr. Foulke will of course be grand chaplain, and we shall have quarterly services, when the knights will march in procession up the parish church, and the music will be conducted by a brass band instead of the organ. It will surely increase the fervour of our younger members, for even the ordinary ribbon of the order is showy, and will not be granted to any who cannot claim a record of uninterrupted attendance at parochial engagements for at least a year. It is a pity you were away to-night," concluded Mr. Miller, "you would have been one of the first ribbons (not but what we might get a special dispensation, for there will be a dis-

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pensing power); and Robert Calthrop came out well in the tenor lead, not so well as you would have done, in my opinion, but several of the congregation thought otherwise. I noticed him walking home with Mrs. Armbruster-Smith after the service, and that brings me to what I wanted to say."

What Mr. Miller wanted to say took a good deal of saying; but it amounted to this, that he had long contemplated separating from Mr. Longstaff, and starting on his own account; he saw there was room in Doddersfield for an establishment conducted on ready-money principles, which would appeal to the tastes of a class rather lower than those who ordinarily frequented Longstaff's; something, too, was to be done in the bankrupt stock line. James had appeared to him from the first exactly qualified for the post of general manager in the shop, and first assistant; possibly, if the concern thrrove, he might become a partner later on. In any case Miller would undertake to double his present salary, and give him a position responsible and honourable. Part of the necessary capital was Mr. Miller's own, saved

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or inherited, the remainder was advanced by a friend, who would be a sleeping partner in the business.

That sleeping partner was Mrs. Armbruster-Smith. How often had poor Smith regretted at midnight that she was not a sleeping partner but a very loquacious one!

In fact, the widow, if her charities were on an extensive scale, was in no sense as guileless as a dove. She had a remarkable scent for good investments, and had long pursued a system of picking up going concerns, finding a capable manager, taking him into partnership, and advancing half the necessary capital. Her work in the organization of charities brought her face to face with many men in comparatively obscure positions, whose energy and method were demonstrated in voluntary business, and whom she was quick to notice, and enter in the tablets of her memory. Thus her godliness most satisfactorily advanced the interests of her worldliness, and the elect of all flocks became her agents in the rich harvest-field where the faithful are fleeced.

Miller had early attracted the keen glance

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of her ever-wakeful eye, and the moment he broached his scheme she had consented. It is true that there was a little struggle between them as to the proportion of the profits, which should properly accrue to the sleeping and the active partner respectively, but both were convinced that they had mutually got hold of the right kind of person, and under those circumstances negotiations between high contracting parties come speedily to a satisfactory solution.

Mr. Miller was particularly charmed with the easy good sense that the lady had shown in dismissing his scruples with reference to leaving Mr. Longstaff and possibly injuring his business. "He might have taken you into partnership himself," she observed, "had he appreciated your true value; as it is, I do what he might have done with advantage to his own interests."

Mrs. Armbruster-Smith had further expressed herself more than satisfied with the position which James was to occupy in the new firm. She thought it highly important that a proper religious tone should prevail among the employés from the first. Steady

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young men were never tempted to defraud their employers—they had no expensive pleasures ; and she had waxed eloquent upon the merits of the Vicar of St. Faith's in finding cheap and wholesome amusements for the young persons of his parish.

“ I do not wish you to come to an immediate decision,” said Mr. Miller ; “ you might like to communicate with your friends. Take—a week ; yes, let us say a week to consider it, and let me know your ultimatum after church next Sunday evening. Of course, you will not breathe a word to anyone.”

“ Does Mr. Walton know of your intentions ? ” inquired James suddenly, as he was leaving the room.

“ No—that is to say, not authoritatively ; he may have surmised them, and—indeed—I regret to have to say, that Mr. Walton is not altogether scrupulous in the methods by which he acquires information. Good night.”

As a matter of fact, Walton and others of his standing in business had discussed every detail of Miller’s scheme for months, and he knew that they had ; nothing was hidden from them, not the premises in which he pro-

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posed to set up business, nor the bankrupt stock which he had purchased, nor the terms on which he was about to deal with such of Mr. Longstaff's travellers as suited him ; even the personality of the sleeping partner had been shrewdly guessed at. Such things form the staple of the conversation of business men —small or great—from the slop shop in the hindermost of back streets, to Rothschild in his bank at Paris ; they are as eternally concerned with their neighbour's speculations as their wives are with their neighbour's house-keeping.

James went to bed in a whirl ; after a little more than two years he saw himself about to set his foot firmly on the ladder which leads up to opulence. How he blessed Mr. Miller ! When he said his prayers he commenced with a thanksgiving that he had been graciously privileged to possess those qualities which had commended him to that hero ; he was thankful for his piety, for his industry, for his good manners, his good bringing up, and even for his good looks, and he comfortably prayed to be allowed to use his great opportunities to the glory of the Giver of them.

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As to his consulting his friends with reference to his decision, who were his friends? Old William Howson, his father knew no more about business than Martha Swaddell who kept the village shop, where hair-oil was retailed at a penny a spoonful on Saturday evenings, and where those who purchased two eggs had not the liberty of choice, but were constrained to take a big one and a little one, and thus escape the reproach of "covetousness." And Eliza Turrell—well, the correspondence with Eliza Turrell had by this time ceased; his last letter had been left unanswered. Eliza had been faithless! And as for the piously given young woman from the millinery department, with whom James walked on half-holiday afternoons, she had no interest in the concern. James was not going to marry her; he walked with her or any other young woman not with matrimonial intentions, but as a collier walks with a dog, because he looks "sic a fond fule" without one. Indeed, James's matrimonial schemes had already taken an ambitious colouring, which was deepened by Mr. Miller's offer. He could not disguise from himself that he

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was treated with special friendliness by the third Miss Armbruster-Smith ; and it really seemed as if, with a little good luck, he might venture to ask her to be Mrs. James Howson.

There was, however, one person to whom he felt that he owed some appearance at least of consultation. It was Mrs. Grange. Now there was a laudable custom at Doddersfield of making holiday every year towards the end of June, and as this annual celebration was due in the following week, James determined to ask Mr. Miller's permission to defer a definite answer till he had been to Nenford, and consulted his first patroness. Miller consented, but contrived to make James feel that it would not be well to be too confidential ; he had not yet approached Mr. Longstaff, and did not wish him to hear anything too soon, "not that it really much matters after all," said Miller, "as mine will be a completely different line of business."

When on the following Saturday James went to the cashier's desk to receive his salary, and announced that he was going home for a holiday, "Ah," said Walton, "by

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the way, Miller has told you now, hasn't he?" Taken thus by surprise, James could only redden and say "Yes." "Well, I would go in for it if I were you," said the cashier; "of course, old Longstaff won't like it, but you can't remain tied to him all your life; and between you and me, he would have acted more wisely if he had taken Miller into partnership. Well, good-bye, enjoy your holiday; be a good boy, and come to see us some Sunday afternoon after you come back." Again James could only redden and say "Yes." But to his present thankful state of mind such Sunday afternoons were as gruesome as a peep into the bottomless pit.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE VILLAGE FEAST.

THE village feast at Nenford was, in ancient times, held upon the day of the saint to whom the parish church was dedicated ; but recently the Saturday after that day was held to be more properly the beginning of the festival, while Monday was the great day of the rejoicings, which had died out by the following Wednesday. By Saturday evening there were already erected ginger-bread booths, swings, aunt sallies, merry-go-rounds—happily not as yet driven by steam—shooting galleries, and sweet shops, in which were vended peppermint boluses, of such enormous size, that one would easily go round a class at the Sunday School three several times, being passed from mouth to mouth till it was no longer capable of being grasped in the fingers.

At this season members of families who had gone to live elsewhere, used to return to visit

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their relatives ; and old men and women might be seen proudly dogging the footsteps of stalwart sons, who were out in the world, and had done well for themselves ; it was the fashion at this time to patch up quarrels, and proclaim a kind of Truce of God, during which slander and backbiting were in abeyance, and everybody set him or herself to think and say the best even of his neighbour. Feast cake was cooked in every house ; a kind of cold Yorkshire pudding, an inch and a half thick, very rich in dripping, and with a juicy layer of sultana raisins at the bottom. Where everybody slept was a mystery. Fortunately the patron saint of Nenford had kindly fixed his day at midsummer, being no less a person than St. John the Baptist ; and there are worse resting places than a bed of new dry hay in a barn.

James returned on the Saturday evening ; some three years ago he had walked to the nearest railway station, carrying his various belongings in a bundle cunningly tied together with handkerchiefs ; now he bore a neat calf-skin bag, which Mr. Miller had pronounced an essential provision for the parochial holiday

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in foreign parts, which had been personally conducted by the Vicar the previous year. Then his clothes showed evidence of the skill of the village tailor ; they were of no particular shape, and hung baggily in various quarters without apparent purpose ; now he was attired in such a costume as the cutter in the tailoring department of Longstaff's thought suitable for the most showy young man in the shop, and most likely to advertise his own proficiency. There had been some change, too, in the inward man ; for as James came to the stile at the top of the hill, which looks down into Nenford, and over Nenford up the valley towards distant Peterborough, as he counted the graceful spires, and recognized the familiar shapes of clumps of trees, as he smelled the fresh hay, with the dog-roses, and heard the crickets in the hedges, for the first time in his life he realized that it was beautiful. " How beautiful are Thy works, O Lord of Hosts," he murmured, " in wisdom hath He made them all ! " and stepped down the hill congratulating himself on the patness of his memory.

The entry to his father's house came upon

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James with something like a shock ; he had been used to consider this house, as it indeed was, the most important house of the village, after the farmers' houses, and now, how small it looked, at the back of the timber yard, where the long planks stood crossed over exaggerated trestles.

His mother was at the door ready to welcome him, his father and brother were cleaning up ; as he bent forward to kiss his mother in his frock-coat, and had to listen to her " whoi moi boi, oi never should a' knowed yer," as she stifled him again and again in her embraces, he secretly resolved not to be very frequent in his visits to Nenford—while as to consulting " his friends "—it was out of the question.

The friendliness of the paternal greeting was somewhat marred by allusions to new clothes ; the proverb, " Fine feathers make fine birds," was freely quoted ; and by the time the whole family had assembled at a state tea in the parlour, James felt like the prize ox at an agricultural show ; the looks of all were fixed on him ; little boys and girls, the children of adjacent kindred, were huddled in the door-

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way, silent, with wondering eyes, and their thumbs in their mouths.

After tea his father said : " May be yer mother's tol't yer of the new gyates as I'm made for Lady Brock ; but yer'll be too greyat for gyates, now ; I'd loike yer to see them though, they're a rare fine job ; and there was a gentleman down from Lunnon, that looked at them, and said as how he'd never seed a finerer ; so yer might take a walk with me that way and see ; though yer was never a good carpenter, like Bill, here ; he's main useful to me, he is." And so after tea they all walked in solemn procession to the back entrance of the Hall, and James, as they went, had to shake hands with old acquaintances, and feel that they nudged one another's shoulders after he had passed, and sniggered, as is the wont of the rustic, when he sees fine clothes upon the backs of those that are in his own opinion no better than himself.

On the whole James did not feel precisely comfortable in his reception, but he consoled himself with the reflection that at the rectory the change in his outward man would meet with the recognition that it deserved.

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It had been Mrs. Grange's wont to be at home to the parish on Saturday evenings at eight o'clock, and at that hour James repaired to the rectory; again how small it looked compared with Mrs. Armbruster-Smith's stately mansion. With perfect confidence James approached the front entrance and rang the bell: in a few moments that door was opened by the injured Eliza. "Back way, young man!" said she, and slammed the door in his face.

James had forgotten Eliza. He turned down the steps in a towering rage, and hastily walked home, prepared to indite a furious note to Mrs. Grange; but there were no opportunities for writing at home, and poor James felt that on the whole the sympathy of the village and the family would be with Eliza. He resolved to waylay Mrs. Grange after church the following morning and ask for an interview. Eliza should not slam the door in his face a second time.

But alas! further humiliations were in store for him. It soon became clear that to the village in general the model young man of Longstaff's, the prospective partner of Mr.

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Miller, was just young James Howson dressed out beyond everything, and guilty of "proide." His father and brother clumsily jeered him; his mother, proud of his appearance, secretly dreaded the judgment that must wait upon so much prosperity, and openly prayed that he might be spared a change of fortune. There further seemed to be a tacit conspiracy among kinsfolk and acquaintances to avoid showing any interest in the ways and doings of Doddersfield. When James accosted Mrs. Grange after church on Sunday morning, she graciously shook hands with him, asked how he was getting on, said she had good reports of him from her brother, and passed on to inquire after old Betsy Gaskin's rheumatics with apparently deep interest, although, as James reflected, there was nothing new in them; for that old lady had been a terrible sufferer in her own estimation from a period "to which the memory of man runneth not."

Many things occurred on that Sunday to make James regret Doddersfield, and to remind him of the unsatisfactory judgment which is passed upon the prophet at home. He was not invited to assist in the Sunday

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School, nor even to sing in the choir; and when Miss Annabella Grange stopped to speak to him, it was to tell him indignantly that she thought he had treated Eliza shamefully.

The Monday festivities began with a service in the church which was attended by the local benefit societies, bearing banners, and preceded by the brass band of the village. Friends and relations were in great force, indeed, the whole population of Nenford, and a considerable proportion of that of the surrounding villages were present, though careful housewives of hospitable mind stayed at home, lest the service should last beyond the hour at which the baker drew his oven crammed with savoury pies.

Most of the young men wore gorgeous button-holes, each of which contained samples of the whole flora of Northamptonshire, their ties were bright green and white, crude blue, or scarlet, checked, striped, glaring ; a few of the old men wore clean smock frocks, with elaborate pleating and stitching over the chest and back, but the majority were attired in black coats and flowered waistcoats, of which

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they felt uncomfortably conscious. Nor were there wanting beaver hats, broad in the brim, possessed of long and well-known pedigrees.

The young women of Nenford did not display that gorgeous and fashionable plumage, which sits so gracefully upon the maid-servant of to-day. Mrs. Grange and Lady Brock were merciless in their repression of extravagant headgear, mothers were comminated, fathers warned, the peccant persons themselves severely chastened, whenever a bunch of artificial flowers found its way into a bonnet, or an ostrich plume nodded in a hat. All this is changed now, and the maidens of Nenford vie with the shoe girls of Northampton in finery and green-sickness. The scarlet flannel cloaks worn by the Sunday School girls were then the sole bright patches of colour in the village.

After church, everybody went home to feed; vast quantities of the heaviest possible pie-crust were consumed as a preparation for the sports in the afternoon; men of noted appetite ate for wagers; beer flowed tumultuous; there was scarcely a house which did

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not boast its “niner,” and, in some, even the hospitable figure of eighteen gallons was reached.

The Hall at Nenford was a stately free-stone edifice, standing among orderly shrubberies, and surrounded by well-kept lawns, sloping down to the park, from which they were separated by a ha-ha ingeniously contrived so that from the house itself there was no apparent break in the continuity of the garden, which appeared to be co-extensive with the domain. The inhabitants of the Hall were wont to watch the annual festival from the lawn in front of the house, uncontaminated by the crowd.

Early in the afternoon the throng began to assemble in the park. There was a flower-show in a tent where the perfume of roses mingled more or less agreeably with the warm odour of trodden grass, and the proceedings were understood to have commenced, when Lady Brock in person having descended across the ha-ha on a temporary plank bridge, had made a tour of the exhibits, and signified her approbation of the prize-winners. Then the brass band struck up inspiring tunes

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with much thumping on the drum, and, pending the commencement of the more serious business of the afternoon, circles would be formed to indulge in the innocent game of French romps, or more guilty kiss in the ring. Here and there when the music was favourable, young men and maidens, and even sturdy matrons ranged themselves in country dances ; occasionally some rustic, full of pie-crust and beer, would dance a lumbering *pas seul* before a select audience with not unfrequent tumbles, fortunate if he escaped the all-pervading eye of Lady Brock, who did not regard such excesses with favour, and was apt to order the offending party off the grounds.

Towards four o'clock the company assembled for tea in a large tent, each guest being provided with his own teacup, saucer, and plate, tied up in a handkerchief. Appalling mounds of cake disappeared with indescribable rapidity ; whole rivers of tea ; little boys, full to bursting, crammed bread and butter into their breeches' pockets ; old women wagged their heads, and extolled the superior quality of last year's soochong ; old men

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nodded waggishly over reminiscences of the Squire "as was," and his father "afore 'im." The hall party paraded round the tables inquiring into the health of invalids, welcoming guests, who were visiting relatives. Lady Brock showed a perfectly royal memory on these occasions, and, indeed, she would have done credit to any throne in Europe. When it had become apparent that no one could possibly eat or drink any more, grace was sung. Mr. Grange made a speech, whose annual incoherence never varied, and called for three cheers for Lady Brock. Then the sports began.

There were races for all ages and all sexes, for married, for single, for every condition of life. Women ran with eggs in spoons, men ran blindfold with wheelbarrows. Some chased pigs with well soaped tails, others swarmed up greasy poles, on whose summits were fixed legs of mutton. Adventurous youths, shielded with pinnafores and with their hands tied behind their backs, bit into suspended loaves, whose treacherous interiors contained treacle and shillings. Then they plunged their faces into tubs full of bran and

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feathers, searching for sixpences. Nor were there wanting boxers and wrestlers.

In the midst of the busy throng walked James, incongruous, tall-hatted, and distinguished. To wear your best clothes at the feast was only right and proper ; not to have done so would have outraged the best feelings of Nenford, and have been construed as indicating a want of proper respect ; but there are best clothes and best clothes. James's raiment was held to be above his station, a criticism which did not apply to the gorgeous flowered waistcoats with enormous buttons, which on this day emerged from dark and dingy presses like butterflies escaping from the chrysalis. Many were the jesting invitations to swarm the greasy pole, which James declined ; many the soaped pig, which was dexterously urged in the direction of his trousers ; but he saved himself from further annoyance by throwing off his coat and hat and facing an old adversary in the boxing ring in a style which stemmed the current of depreciation.

James, having floored his antagonist, was making his way through the crowd to inspect

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the prizes, when he felt himself violently prodded in the back, and almost immediately afterwards discovered that a kind of horn hook or claw had firmly encircled his arm. Turning sharply round he found himself face to face with old Martha Swaddell, whose wrinkled countenance was dimly visible in the back regions of an enormous coal-scuttle bonnet, in which it appeared much as if one had been looking at an ordinary human face through the wrong end of a telescope. "Young man," she cried, in visible excitement, "young man I want's to speak wi' yer; it's about my buryin!" James disembarrassed himself of the umbrella handle and prepared to listen, for Martha had the reputation of being a "character."

"I've made a contrac with your feyther to bury me, and I've paid him three-and-twenty shillin down, it's a deal o' money, to see me buried, but I've got no writin from 'im, and I'm thinkin that when I'm gone 'e'll just evacuate with 'is bargain. I'm sure I've tried 'ard to be took scores and scores o' times, and it ain't no fault o' mine as I warn't buried last spring when I had the brown

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titus, and may be 'e 'll think 'e's free 'o 'is contrac, seeing as how I've disappinted 'im so often; but I couldn't 'a' been took livin, it wouldn't 'a' been roight nohow. I knows I did all as I could, I did, I took all the doctors' stuff, and did all as they told me, but it warn't no good, the Lord wouldn't 'ave me, nor my sperrit wouldn't take its floight. Here's the list of my doctors' names, not one of 'em as has done me a bit of good," said Martha drawing from her pocket a small ragged dirty bit of paper, "so as you may see as I troied, and troied hard. So you must just promise me as you'll force your feyther to keep 'is contrac and bury me when my time comes, and if 'e's took afore me you'll do it yourself, for you wouldn't be for cheatin a poor old woman out of her due." James cheerfully undertook to see that Martha's wishes should be respected, and was being treated to a full and complete account of her last illness but one, at which period her "leg's were that swelled, as nobody wouldn't believe there was that in 'em to swell so," when a message reached him to the effect that Lady Brock wished to speak to him.

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Among the inhabitants of Nenford there were some individuals who enjoyed, by an apparently prescriptive right, the favour and confidence of the higher powers; who were visited at greater length, and who were invariably noticed more particularly on public occasions. Certain families even were understood to be regarded with peculiar favour by the Hall; and though their merits might be denied by notorious evil livers—by those tainted with the sin of poaching and other crimes, inconsistent with rural well-being—the arrangement on the whole coincided with the public verdict, the more so, that the favoured ones were not the recipients of charity to any greater extent than their neighbours, and did not outwardly benefit by the rays of the sun of favour which shone impartially upon oddities like Martha Swaddell, notorious grumblers like Eliza's mother Caran Turrell, and sweet, gentle old women like Caroline Howson, in whom simplicity and refinement were a natural gift.

It is not for a moment to be supposed that such persons were exempt from the commoner failings of rustic humanity, or that

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their conversation was freer from animadversions upon the perversities and iniquities of those around them. Even Caroline Howson herself, grievously provoked by the niggardly dealings of Martha Swaddell in her management of the village shop, had once expressed a charitable wish that the Lord might forgive her her sins, and take her to Himself; but, perhaps, there was in these families a capacity for discipline, a latent energy awaiting development, which forced recognition, though nobody knew precisely what was recognized. Strength of character asserts itself quite as much in turning existing conditions to the best account, as in reconstructing the universe. To modern ideas the deference paid to Lady Brock in Nenford would appear a fatuous servility; but modern ideas have never seen Lady Brock at tea with Mrs. Howson, witnessed her respect for the position of her hostess, heard her own grandson, the heir to all the estates, smartly scolded for presuming to keep on his hat in a cottage, or perhaps they would be less hasty to condemn conditions of life which have passed away beyond recall.

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Caroline Howson had encountered her ladyship as she left the tea-table, and after the usual remarks about the weather on that occasion and previous occasions, Lady Brock had observed : “ Is that really your son James, Caroline, that tall young fellow in a black coat ? ”

“ Yes, your ladyship,” said Caroline ; “ it’s the first time as ’e’s been back for three year, and I hardly knows ’im. Not but what ’e’s gettin on well like where ’e is ; and ’e’s been talkin’ about a partnership or summut, that ’e’s to have when he goes back ; but ’e always was that masterful, your ladyship, and I’m sure ’e’s loike, as if he couldn’t talk to ’is feyther and ’is brother. I was much agin’ ’is going away, I was ; but Mrs. Grange would have it, and I don’t know as I ought to complain, but I feel as if my boy that was, is gone from me like.”

“ Ah, I understand,” said her ladyship, drawing her own conclusions, “ I would like to speak to him, tell him, to come to me on the lawn.”

To wish to leave Nenford was a high crime and misdemeanour in Lady Brook’s

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eyes. To advance the interests of the deserving by recommending them to friends at a distance was one thing, but that the deserving should take the initiative into their own hands was another; and when promotion was due to the good offices of Mrs. Grange, Lady Brock was disposed to be more than usually unsympathetic, although in other respects the two women worked well together for the good of the parish.

She was a terrible woman was this little Lady Brock—for little she was, though like Louis XIV. she had the art of appearing taller than anybody else—and when she slowly drew back her head, and looked at you along her nose, the tallest men felt infinitely small in comparison.

It was some little time before her behests reached James, and she had been accumulating no small fund of indignation when he at last made his appearance, and crossed the temporary plank bridge to the lawn. He was hot from his boxing, and felt unpresentable. He bowed, lifted his hat, put it on again, and confronted her ladyship. In attendance were Mrs. Grange, Miss Annabella, and a few

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friends of the family. Lady Brock stared ; James stood rather sheepish. Lady Brock continued to stare. At last she spoke : " Young man, are you aware who I am ? " James smiled feebly and replied, " Yes, my lady." " Then where is your hat ? " said the dowager, pointing with her parasol at the offending head-piece. James would have liked to say, " On my head, my lady ; " but old habits were too strong for him, he removed it. Miss Annabella giggled. " You seem to have forgotten many things since you left us," continued Lady Brock. " You have forgotten, sir, the respect due from one in your position in life, to those that are called to be over them. You have learned to spend your money on dress unsuitable to your station, and I hear you have forgotten to honour your parents. If you do not honour your parents, your days will not be long in the land, and you will come to a bad end. You will be disgraced. You have already broken your engagement to a good, honest girl, better than you deserve ; and your kind friend, Mrs. Grange, must be deeply disappointed in the return which you

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have made to her exertions in your behalf. When you have recovered the humility which is befitting to you, I shall be glad to see you again, and congratulate you on your worldly success. At present I can only wish you—repentance!" concluded the old lady, raising a warning finger, and waving it several times, as she turned her back upon him.

What could poor James do?

He happened to catch Mrs. Grange's eye. "Madam," he said, desperately, "do not think I am ungrateful for what you have done for me. I called to see you on Saturday evening, but the door was slammed in my face."

"What door?" said Mrs. Grange.

"The front door," replied James.

Lady Brock turned round with a shrug to Mrs. Grange. "I told you so, my dear. These towns cause the most lamentable confusion of rank. This young man has forgotten everything. Let us go into the house."

And the whole party sauntered off to the hall-door, leaving James on the lawn, a radical.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION LECTURER.

JAMES left Nenford the next morning in a thoroughly bad temper. He had spent the evening quarrelling with his family, had behaved in such a way, that his mother said, wailingly, it was a mystery to her ; and had blasphemously spoken evil of dignities till his father ordered him to stop, or leave the house. Notwithstanding this old William walked with him the next day some four miles to the nearest station, and on the way expressed himself to the following effect :

“ I’m main sorry, lad, as we should a’ had words last night, but I couldn’t abear to see your poor mother discommoded like. There’s a many things beyond her comprehension, poor thing, and them as has been good friends to her, she can’t bear them run down. She never were that strong in the intellects, but she’s that tender-hearted, and I warrant

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she 'll be cryin' the rest o' the day over your goin' away, for she's very fond o' you, Jim, is your poor mother. As for what's between you and her ladyship, both's right and both's wrong. She's a haughty way with her has her ladyship, and there's some folk do say as she's proud; but she's always been a good friend to me and mine, and what I allays says is, "You keep in with her ladyship, and her ladyship 'ull keep in with you! She has her idees, and her fallals, and maybe she's a bit old-fashioned, and wantin' more respect than the young folks nowadays is ready to give, but she don't hurt nobody, forbye a bit of cold in the head at times, with standin' talkin' without a hat to you; and if the Lord's put her there for His own pleasure, we must take her as she is. I were a bit took aback myself when I first see'd you, but I've a bin considerating, and my consideration is that them as sent you away to better yerself, should not be vexed with you for being better off than you was when you left us. Them folks up at the Rectory is down on you about Eliza, women is that way you know; but you'd be a throwin' o' yourself

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away you would to take up with Eliza now ; and she's got another chap already, Sam Gaskin, old Gaskin's son, him as works with me. So there's not much for her to cry about neither."

Encouraged by these admonitions, James told his father fully about the intended partnership, for partnership it was already in his mind, and received the paternal approbation.

While they were waiting for the train, old William resumed : "As for what you was sayin' about that there partnership, I wouldn't be too venturesome, but I'd see as there was somethin' to fall back on in case it fails. And if you should see a chance of puttin' a couple o' hundred pounds into a safe spekkilation, you might let me know on it, for I've a bit o' money saved more than I can make use on in my business, and bein' where you are, you're like to hear on things, and it ain't well to let folks hereabout know as you've got anythin' put away, or they'll be makin' Creases on you directly, and put up the price o' timber accordin'. And you might think to write to your poor mother a bit oftener."

So father and son parted on good terms.

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A railway journey promotes reflection, and James had plenty of leisure to chew the cud of bitterness against Lady Brock. His father was right; she and Mrs. Grange should have recognized the change in his position. He had done what they intended, more than they had intended; others had made fortunes, why not he? and his soul was filled with a consuming desire to be rich. He thought of Dick Whittington and Samuel Budgett.

After several changes and waits, the invariable feature of a journey between places not on one of the direct roads from London to Edinburgh, James found himself at last definitely in the train for Doddersfield, and in a compartment with only one other person. This was a young man wearing spectacles, very busy with some books and papers, too busy, in fact, to notice his fellow-passenger. At last he closed a volume of Knight's "Pictorial History of England," replaced it in the bag along with his papers, lit a pipe, and looked about him. His eye fell on James's bag, which by his mother's care was adorned with a large label, "Mr. James Howson, Passenger, Doddersfield." If the

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good old woman had had her own way, James's exact address, even to the number of the room which he occupied at Longstaff's, would have been added, for she was firmly persuaded that railways existed chiefly to divert luggage from its lawful destination.

"Ah, I see you are going to Doddersfield!" said the stranger; "perhaps you could tell me whether there is a tramway from the station to Mr. Ffoulke's?"

Mr. Ffoulke's house did not stand immediately adjacent to the tramway. The stranger reflected.

"How far is it from the station to the vicarage?" James surmised just under a mile. "Ah, I see, a shilling cab-fare. Thank you." And the conversation lapsed for a time. "By the way," suddenly resumed the stranger, "what did I understand you to say the tramway fare would be to the nearest point?" "Twopence," replied James.

"And is there any charge for parcels?"

"Not if you carry them in your hand," said James, "but there is a charge of one penny for every package put under the care of the conductor; they carry them outside the tram.

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The stranger resumed his calculations. Presently he started afresh.

"Wages are high now in Doddersfield, I believe?" James replied in the affirmative. "Then do you suppose I could find a man to carry my luggage from the tramway to the vicarage for sixpence?" James thought it would be possible. "It's a high charge for the service done. Could I not get anyone for less?" Again James thought it possible, Doddersfield, in spite of its commercial prosperity, being well provided with loafers ready to barter their souls for a mug of beer.

"Ah, well, that's what I will do," said the stranger; at the worst he would be able to economize a penny, and with circumspection, possibly threepence. "By the way," he went on, "what is the price of beer in Doddersfield?" "Fourpence a pint," said James, "but you would get a man to do more for a threepenny whisky."

The stranger accepted the suggestion in silence, and then inquired whether James knew Doddersfield well; whether he knew Mr. Ffoulke. James replied in the affirmative, and evinced some complacency in being

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able to say that he was a member of Mr. Ffoulke's congregation ; indeed, one of the choir. This naturally opened the way for a duet in praise of Mr. Ffoulke, who appeared to be no less well known at Cambridge than at Doddersfield. Then the stranger asked whether Mr. Ffoulke had ever said anything about University Extension ; and James replied that he had spoken on the subject at a meeting of the Young Men's Christian Association, and at the annual tea of the Parochial Mutual Improvement Society, on both of which occasions he had urged one and all to take tickets for a course of lectures to be given in the autumn. James, however, was not quite clear in his mind as to what was meant by University Extension, and inquired whether it had anything to do with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The stranger deprecated any connection between the two institutions, and hastened to explain how it had become generally felt at the Universities that not enough was being done by them to influence the country at large, to popularize themselves. Unhappily, those who could go to the Universities were a very small

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minority of the population, and, therefore, as the people of England could not go to the Universities, the Universities had determined to go to the people of England ; he himself was on his way to Doddersfield to deliver an address on behalf of the movement, to explain its aims, and generally create an interest in the courses of lectures shortly to be inaugurated.

James was rather puzzled, though he did not say so ; he knew that Mr. Grange was a university man, because he had once asked what was the meaning of the crimson and black garment that he wore on his back in church ; and he also knew that Lady Brock's nephew had been to college and come home again because he could not pass his examinations. And he knew that there was a university boat race, and a university cricket match ; Mr. Grange went to the latter every year, but he didn't see how they could be extended. For the present he forbore further inquiry on the main question, and merely asked what would be the subjects of the lectures, and what would there be to be got by them. The stranger explained how by

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sitting for examination at the end of the course, and satisfying the examiners, it was possible to get a degree with shortened residence. "And when you had the degree, what then?" asked James. "Oh, well, you had a valuable certificate which could be produced——" "If I wanted a new situation?" surmised James. "Well, not exactly; but, in any case, you would be able to attend the Long Vacation meetings at either of the universities, which lasted a fortnight." "And what do you do there?" inquired James. "Why, attend lectures," said the stranger. "Always lectures," thought James, and pondered silently.

The stranger was no less a person than Mr. Cadwallader Pritt, M.A., one of the pioneers in that mighty movement whereby the universities of Oxford and Cambridge have put away from them for ever the reproaches addressed to them by Adam Smith, Gibbon, and the poet Gray. No longer do the "three sisters of old," the faculties of Divinity, Law, and Medicine, "alternately Guzzle and scold;" their house is set in order, they wear blue ribbons, they examine in

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Tasmania, Australia, Cape Colony, and possibly the New Jerusalem. They admit both sexes, and would open their examinations to a third if there was one. Orgies of cocoa have taken the place of wines, beer is banished from breakfast, undergraduates practise economy, not from niggardliness or poverty, but from high principle; they are before all things practical; learn and read only what is immediately useful for examinations, hang round the afternoon tea-tables of married dons, and believe in the adorable qualities of the working man. The pious rush for curacies in crowded towns, the intellectual hasten to escape from the alma mater to the wide, free air of Toynbee Hall and Whitechapel. Those who remain behind are understood to be occupied in research.

Mr. Pritt had been one of the most successful lecturers on the staff; he could recite yards of English poetry with the elocution of a Nonconformist preacher; he therefore generally broke the ground with a course on English literature, and stirred raptures in the bosoms of the respectable in our manufacturing towns. He could even dress up

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political economy in a garb which was not unpleasing to the artisans, and knew little enough of history to be able to moralize by the hour on the virtues of good Queen Bess and Oliver Cromwell, and to reduce every great man to the dead level of nonentity, which wins the approbation of the middle classes.

Doddersfield was at length reached and the acquaintances parted, James having promised to attend the forthcoming lecture and to bring some friends.

Mr. Miller was unaffectedly pleased to see James again ; he was full of questions about Nenford, and was glad to hear that James had his father's approval of the step that he was about to take. He had already given notice to Mr. Longstaff, and hoped to open his new place of business in a month's time. At present he was occupied with the blaze of advertisements which was to herald the enterprise. The first step would be the sudden apparition on all the hoardings of Doddersfield of slips bearing in large black capitals the words "Miller and Co." In the neighbouring towns companion slips would be posted simply indicating "Doddersfield" as

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the headquarters of the firm. Leaflets descriptive of the merits of the firm, its cheapness, its fashion, its variety, would be slipped into every book, magazine, or newspaper sold in Doddersfield. Railway stations, trams, cabs, and perambulators would all bear the legend "Miller and Co." The mothers of Doddersfield would vie with one another in securing for their children sunshades from whose points would proudly float a pennon emblazoned "Miller and Co." A brass band had been engaged to parade the streets in Dolton, Halifax, Chewsbury, Panchester, Tommorton, Kuddersfield, Tadford, and other adjacent towns, each bandsman wearing one trouser-leg scarlet and the other white, with Doddersfield printed down one, and Miller and Co. down the other. You could not even escape at breakfast, for all the butter was to be stamped "Miller and Co." and the same was imprinted in aniline dyes upon new laid eggs. A troop of donkeys, attended by clowns, was to parade Doddersfield itself for a fortnight, bearing boards on which was written "Go to Miller and Co. for corsets." "Go to Miller and Co. for

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shirts." "Go to Miller and Co. for boot-laces." "Go to Miller and Co. for hats." "Go to ——" There was no end to the things which could be bought of "Miller and Co.," and the shop was to be called the IMPERIAL EMPORIUM.

James wrote to Mr. Longstaff announcing his departure, and was honoured with a personal interview. His employer expressed a little disappointment at the abrupt termination of their connection ; of course if James saw his advantage in taking other work, he would be the last to object, but he would certainly have preferred to be consulted, seeing that he had taken James into his service to oblige Mrs. Grange, and indeed had proposed to himself to do even more for him later on.

"I am very sorry, sir," stammered James, "I was not aware that it was necessary."

"No, young man," interrupted Mr. Longstaff, "it was not necessary that you should consult me, but it is expedient to do many things which are not necessary. I have a young man ready to take your place in my establishment, and as it will be more con-

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venient to me that he should enter upon his duties at once, you will give this note to the cashier, who will pay you a month's salary, and an equivalent for board and lodging, and you will be at liberty to work for Mr. Miller from this moment. Good morning."

"Am I to understand, then, that I am dismissed?" began James, indignant; he had expected to be shaken hands with, receive congratulations, good wishes, and now he felt as if he had got the sack.

"No—oh no—certainly not," said Mr. Longstaff. "You gave me a month's notice, and I preferred to take your notice at once, that's all ;—you will find that I have fulfilled all my legal obligations when you go to the cashier; again, good morning!"

There was nothing further to be said, and James went to Walton's desk with the note; his humour was not improved when that worthy looked up with the remark, "Sacked, eh! well, I wouldn't have thought it of you; you should be more careful of the company you keep on Sundays, young man;" and he proceeded to open the cash-drawer with a grin.

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James was furious ; he had not yet recovered from the ill-success of his visit to Nenford, from Lady Brock's commination, from the door slammed by Eliza ; for years he had been used to look upon himself as rather better than the ordinary run of young men, he was quite sure that he had always acted irreproachably, and now everybody seemed to turn against him at once.

Walton, however, seeing that James was really annoyed, said kindly : " He's rather sharp, is the governor, when things don't quite please him, and it's not likely that he's best pleased with Miller's starting a rival establishment. Don't let us pass out of sight, but now you're a free man in the evenings drop along some night about seven o'clock and have supper with us."

James withdrew to pack up his belongings ; the other young men, hearing the news, began at once to speculate upon who was to succeed him, and proceeded to re-arrange the departments according to their own ideas.

So James Howson passed out of Longstaff's, and entered the service of the Imperial Emporium.

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All breaks are painful, and for the first day or two James was depressed by the change from Longstaff's menagerie, as the profane called it, to lodgings; from the order of a well-filled, busy shop to the desolation of the halls of the nascent emporium, full of litter, stinking of matting and shavings ; but on Sunday he resumed his customary duties, he taught in the Sunday School as usual, he sang in the choir as usual, and as he marched down the church, vigorously chanting the tenor of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," his eye caught the steadfast gaze of the third Miss Armbruster-Smith, and he was startled to find himself suddenly hot and blushing.

Poor little Emma ! she had learned something while James was away at Nenford. Neither psalms nor hymns, nor organ, nor antiphones were of any interest to her, when one particular curly head was absent from the choir.

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CHAPTER X.

CULTURE.

By the middle of the following winter the success of the Imperial Emporium was assured ; the radiant Miller had bought himself a dwelling suitable for a churchwarden, and even James lived in his own hired house. Those were the days of rapid expansion, the days when money rolled without effort into the pockets of artisans, when the casual collier drank champagne, and the thrifty invested his savings in companies, which eventually proved to have been called into being solely for the advantage of their directors. Every woman had plenty to spend, and the police found it difficult to keep the pavement in front of Miller and Co. free for the circulation of foot passengers : the huge plate glass windows were perceptibly curved at the nose-line of would-be customers. Every now and then highly respectable men issued from the doors

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of the emporium and armed wavering matrons into its halls ; there they were treated much after the methods of the Spanish bull-ring ; blue and scarlet were waved before their dazzled eyes ; fabrics floated everywhere around them, till at length, bewildered and indeterminate, they sank into opportune chairs, deftly offered just when the panting animal was obviously ready to drop ; then, only half reluctant, they surrendered themselves to the plunderer.

Miller was not the man to let the tide of fortune rise unheeded ; dexterously throwing himself on to the crest of the wave, he prepared to start branch establishments in the adjacent towns, and even larger villages ; his imagination foresaw the day when fleets would speed over the Atlantic, labelled Miller and Co.; existing solely for the convenience of his customers. James, meanwhile, became practically the resident manager at Doddersfield, and more than justified the opinions that had been formed of him. Not only did he conduct the internal operations of the great establishment with energy and ability, but he kept himself before the public as an

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active member of the congregation of St. Faith's, and, pioneered by Mr. Cadwallader Pritt, prepared to exploit those fields of learning which the University of Cambridge was so generously throwing open to the young men of England. He had attended the inaugural lecture, occupied a seat on the platform, and listened with enthusiasm to a discourse in which the practical advantages of knowledge, and especially of such knowledge as forms the stock-in-trade of the University of Cambridge, were copiously illustrated. He heard how, without Sir Isaac Newton, Fellow of Trinity, the steam-hammer and the spinning-jenny would have been impossible, and how the application of electricity to every department of modern life rendered it imperative to foster research. He was told, and was only too ready to believe, that every town, and possibly every village in England, contained men of intellect, whose faculties dwindled because the opportunity of employing them had never been granted, but to whom the portals of learning and prosperity were now to be opened. He was further informed that the study of history would obviate all the dis-

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advantages that short-sighted politicians had professed to anticipate in the extension of the suffrage, and that studious pursuits would eliminate the vice of drunkenness. When at the end of the evening he was asked by the Vicar to thank the lecturer on behalf of the St. Faith's Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society, he did so in terms which elicited universal applause. And he had the advantage of the private intimacy of the great teacher before long, for on taking up his residence in Doddersfield, Mr. Pritt had not forgotten his fellow passenger; the wish for disciples was strong in him, and it was part of his programme to get hold of promising young men.

James spent many an evening with him, studying Political Economy, and learning from the works of John Stuart Mill how wicked it is to be a landed proprietor, to keep numbers of servants, horses and carriages, and to maintain a large unproductive establishment. This doctrine seemed to him marvellously applicable to Lady Brock; though he was not equally attracted by the millenarian visions of the fervid sage, who anticipates a time when

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all having learned to appreciate the merits of bread and onions, the capitalist will live like one of his own labourers, and spend his surplus income in indefinitely adding to the wages-fund, and providing new fields of employment for an ever-increasing army of workers.

From Mr. Cadwallader Pritt, too, James learned how contemptible is the man without a cause, and though he would not definitely bring himself to enlist under any of the banners which were waved before him, having been warned by Miller that as a man of business he must not be too prominently connected with any movement that was not simply charitable, he determined, in a quiet way, to realize his ambition to be considered one of the renovators of Society. It seemed so simple in talking to Mr. Cadwallader Pritt, to build a new heaven and a new earth ; just an Act of Parliament here, and a police regulation there ; some little compulsory self-denial, and, behold—we are all chaste, sober, and moderately rich ; nor is the wail of the destitute heard in our streets.

It was, however, in the Debating Society

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that James first found his feet : ere long there had grown out of the Extension Lectures a Parliamentary Club, whose rules were based upon those of the Cambridge Union, and whose discussions mimicked those of our great national assembly in every respect except disorder. The spirit of public speaking broke out in James ; he learned Burke by heart, glowed for Mr. Gladstone, and studied attitudes before a looking-glass. Mr. Cadwallader Pritt impressed him deeply with the necessity of making up for previous deficiencies in education, and spoke as if that defect alone stood between him and, in the fulness of time, a seat in the mother of Parliaments.

Consequently James attended a course of lectures upon the Greek tragedians, was enraptured by the sonorous flow of the English translations as recited by Mr. Cadwallader Pritt ; and at times forgot the presence of the four Miss Armbruster-Smiths, who were there attended by a maid, having arrived with note books cased in American cloth.

The advent of the Extension Lectures had been awaited by the ladies of Doddersfield with considerable misgiving, and had been

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the subject of much cautious debate, conducted on approved feminine methods.

First Mrs. Muncie had called upon Mrs. Fullblaster Ffoulke, and with many apologies ventured to ask her whether certain statements were true. As a matter of fact nobody had ever made any statements, they were all invented by Mrs. Muncie to conceal the fact that she was first in the field. These statements had to do with the room in which the lectures were to begin, the precise hour of the afternoon or evening, the subject to be dealt with ; the matrimonial condition of the lecturer. Mrs. Muncie had been informed that everybody who attended the lectures would be compelled to go to Cambridge to be examined, that there would be a mixture of classes and sexes ; she deprecated going out after dark. Mrs. Ffoulke referred her to Mr. Cadwallader Pritt, who was staying in the house, and came in to afternoon tea. After the usual compliments, comparisons of the climate of Doddersfield with that of Cambridge, expressions of sentiment on the relative merits of the bracing and the relaxing, and a short divagation upon the benefits which Mr.

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Muncie had derived from a visit to Harrogate, the lady suddenly turned a beaming countenance upon the gentleman, and said :

“ So I hear *everybody* is going to your lectures, Mr. Pritt ! ”

Not observing the stress upon the word everybody, he replied, enthusiastically : “ Yes, everybody, and more than everybody, I hope ; in fact I doubt whether the Assembly rooms will be big enough to hold us all.”

“ Really, I must congratulate you ; but of course I am not surprised ; we have heard so much of your doings at Sheffield and Liverpool. It must be so nice to have the gift of dealing with subjects that are really popular, instead of making us all feel that we have to go to school again. I am sure I could not persuade my girls to go, if it was to be anything like school ; and they have quite a horror of examinations. There is much too much cram nowadays, don’t you think so ? I am sure my poor boy hardly slept for six months before going in for his last College of Preceptors. But we ladies shall be spared, of course.”

“ Oh, it will entirely rest with you, madam :

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your daughters will be able to sit for examination or not, just as they please ; though for my own part, I should strongly urge them to follow the usual course, take notes, write answers to the weekly questions, and attend class."

Mrs. Muncie shifted her ground. " Do you happen to know the names of any ladies who have bought tickets ? it would be so much nicer for my girls to go with their friends ; you see it is quite a new thing, and one does not like to be singular. Are the Miss de Tallbois going ? "

Mrs. Muncie did not enjoy the honour of the acquaintance of the Miss de Tallbois, who were held to represent the aristocracy of Duddersfield.

Mr. Cadwallader Pritt had not heard of the Miss de Tallbois, but he believed tickets had been bought by Mrs. Armbruster-Smith.

" Of course, yes, how stupid of me not to think of it ; they are such intimate friends of yours, Mrs. Ffoulke, and you are so much interested in the movement that they could not well do otherwise. Is their mother going with them or will they be escorted by their maid ? "

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The conversation was very soon diverted into channels quite unforeseen by the innocent Extension Lecturer ; even into a discussion as to the propriety of issuing family tickets, which would admit young ladies with their chaperone or escort ; Mrs. Muncie thought it would be so much more satisfactory if her maid were allowed to sit with her daughters ; she was not used to the idea of these mixed classes, and, of course, as a mother she saw things which a bachelor could not be expected to contemplate.

After a little further fencing, and a sarcastic intimation that if the maid or chaperone took notes she would certainly have to pay full fees and sit for examination, Mrs. Muncie withdrew in a flood of compliments and good wishes, hoping before long to have the pleasure of entertaining Mr. Cadwallader Pritt in her own house ; Mr. Muncie, she averred, was fond of the society of intellectual men.

The careful mother proceeded straight to the house of Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, with whom she was not particularly well acquainted, and represented herself as an enthusiastic advo-

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cate of the Extension movement in search of guidance ; who more qualified to give it than Mrs. Armbruster-Smith ? The widow beamed, talked solemnly of the duty incumbent upon girls of improving themselves, spoke slightly of mere accomplishments as a matrimonial investment, and said that she should certainly send her maid. As to whether the Miss de Tallbois went or no she was perfectly indifferent, she had not the pleasure of their acquaintance, but knew her duty to her daughters.

"And yet, Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, you must admit that it would be such an excellent thing if they could be got to go. They are so much looked up to, and it would give quite a tone to the lectures if they took them up," —at this moment the young ladies entered, and Mrs. Muncie continued—"By the way, that young Mr. Howson is taking quite a prominent part in getting these lectures attended. What a clever young fellow he is ; and so superior ! I am sure I always felt he was much too good to stand behind a counter, though they say he comes of quite a poor family somewhere down Northampton-

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shire. For my part I am sure that does not matter ; for I am one of those who believe in nature's gentlemen." And Mrs. Muncie let her eyes rest for a moment on each of the Miss Armbruster-Smiths in turn. Poor little Emma ! Why cannot we control our blushes ? she turned aside and picked up some work, and, when she looked around again in the direction of Mrs. Muncie, was relieved to observe that that lady had noticed nothing, and was deep in the discussion of the merits of the Grand Order of St. Faith. Poor little Emma again ! it was only the very faintest blushes that could escape the vigilant eyes of Mrs. Muncie, even at twilight, and the mental comment had already been made : " I was quite right, I knew that girl was in love with him."

And so it came to pass that James assisted the Miss Smiths in their notes on the Greek tragedians, and discussed with them the proper pronunciation of the names of heroes and heroines, and walked home with them after the lectures ; and the maid said nothing, because she felt as if she had been listening to the Bible, and then she had a love affair of her own.

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CHAPTER XI.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BAZAAR.

IN the spring it became clear to the Vicar of St. Faith's that the parish needed a bazaar. Mr. Miller's Order of St. Faith's had failed to hit the public taste ; and, indeed, the scheme had been wrecked in its infancy upon a rock which had escaped the notice of its astute originator. In appropriating the methods of the Primrose League Mr. Miller had overlooked the fact that there are Primrose dames of various degree, but all exalted, corresponding to the knights and paladins ; the new Order had barely been alluded to at Mrs. Muncie's tea table, before dames of St. Faith had begged for ribbons.

The ribbon devised by Miller was showy, and Mrs. Muncie felt that with a few improvements, suggested by herself, it would be capable of drawing satisfactory attention to the charms of the Misses Alethea and

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Vera Muncie. Other matrons were found to hold similar views, and for a time all went well; but on the eve of the first grand procession of the Order, so violent a quarrel arose among the champions and championesses as to the order of their going, that badges and bands were torn off forthwith and indignantly consigned to the bottoms of waste paper baskets, and the innermost recesses of chests of drawers. At first it had seemed quite a simple matter for *preux chevalier* to march by the side of *preuse chevalière*, but when Miss Alethea Muncie proved to be thus coupled with bland young Mr. Smallkey from the Imperial Emporium, Mrs. Muncie put down her maternal foot. The difficulty of getting a lady to walk beside Miller had been got over at once, by allowing him to stride ahead of the whole party as First Knight Grand Champion of St. Faith; but all the gentlemen could not be similarly accommodated, and eventually Mrs Fullblossomley, an amiable and extensive lady, suggested that the dames should walk together in front, and the knights behind. To this objections were naturally raised by

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those who had secured the partners they wished for, motives were imputed, bitter recriminations ensued, all the ladies talked at once, feathers began to fly, Miller flew about to agitated groups applying sedatives, but to no effect. Before long it became apparent that the room was divided into factions, lead respectively by Mrs. Muncie and Mrs. Arm-bruster-Smith, who were engaged in single combat under the chandelier.

"I cannot submit to have such things said of my daughters, madam," stated the deep-toned widow with solemn energy.

"But it is well known that they do," said Mrs. Muncie, and the voices of her backers were heard from behind. "That's right, dear, give it her back, don't let her call you a liar."

"Do what?" rolled out the tremendous widow.

"Go about with shop boys," replied Mrs. Muncie in a matter-of-fact voice ; and again the chorus of approbation rose from behind.

The widow heaved horrific, she amplified herself, and swung her raiment around : "To such an unwomanly remark, madam, it is

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beneath me to reply," and so saying, pale, but stately, with dignity undiminished, in spite of a consciousness of cracked stay bones, she left the apartment, being only momentarily arrested in her march by the intervention of a trembling curate, who offered unavailing intercession, and sought and won the crown of martyrdom that waits for the would-be maker of peace.

With a parish in this state, there was nothing for it but a bazaar ; besides, something had to be done to counterbalance the growing popularity of the Extension Lectures. There was reason to fear that the young ladies would take entirely to note books, neglecting those higher things that swelled the funds of the charities of St. Faith's.

The Vicar was not long in discovering defects and deficiencies in "our sacred edifice," which could only be remedied by at once raising a thousand pounds. His conscience did not allow him to have recourse in the ordinary way to theatricals or a ball in order to provide funds for a purpose so intimately connected with the spiritual work of his parish, but to a bazaar there could be no

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objection. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Armbruster-Smith had threatened secession if there were theatricals, but had offered a provision stall if there were to be a bazaar.

Fertile Miller was ready with suggestions as soon as the idea was broached. The Imperial Emporium would do this; the Imperial Emporium would do that; through its agency the spoils of China and Peru would be laid at the feet of Mrs. Ffoulke.

The first thing was to get a name for the bazaar containing as many "y's" and "e's" as possible, and giving opportunity for the employment of coloured pasteboard in the decoration of the stalls. The parochial trip to Flanders at once suggested

Ye Olde Flemmyse Fayre

to Mr. Ffoulke's inventive mind, and the stall holders immediately began to order dresses after Dutch pictures. Gifts of all kinds poured in, advertising tradesmen sent portions of their unsaleable stock; godly grocers furnished tea, coffee, sugar, and sweet-meats; owners of gardens sent their rhubarb stalks and other things superfluous at home.

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Then the young ladies, who possessed accomplishments, drew, painted, gutta-percha moulded ; they smeared daffodils and lilies, clematis and chrysanthemums on china, on glass, on draining-tiles, and bread pans ; those more gay than industrious got up concerts, tableaux, fortune-telling booths ; dabblers in palmistry, who had read the "Gypsies in Spain," elaborated for themselves striking costumes. Before long the Vicar was able to congratulate himself upon having circumvented the orthodox scruples of Mrs. Armbruster-Smith. There were to be no theatricals it is true, but there was to be a *café chantant*, a waxwork show, a dumb pantomime, and performing dolls. Nigger minstrels, of course, there were to be, it is so easy to perform on the banjo, and there was naturally a toy symphony in rehearsal, and an ocarina band. The Boy's Brigade practised vigorously on penny whistles in the evenings to the distraction of the neighbourhood.

Meanwhile the Vicar sought in vain for some overpowering attraction. "It is a great pity," said Mrs. Ffoulke, "that you do not know Lady Notoria Vane."

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“But, my dear, she was in the Divorce Court only last August ; I don’t wish to know her. And what on earth put her into your head just now? The way in which you women run off at a tangent——”

“Who’s running off at a tangent? You want some one to draw crowds to your bazaar. Well, she sings splendidly, and everybody would come to see her, if not to hear her.”

“But, my dear, with such a past !”

“Past fiddlestick! She has repented deeply, poor thing! I know it on the best authority. However, the Roman Catholics have got her, so I suppose it is out of the question. I am told she makes hundreds for them! How unprincipled those people are !”

The Vicar agreed as to the want of principle so lamentably obvious in Roman Catholics, and cudgelled his brains to find some equivalent for Lady Notoria.

Meanwhile the young Ffoulkes were busy getting up a show. Everything was to be as at a real fair ; peep-shows, strange monstrosities, none of the ordinary punning sham, but the real thing. A schoolfellow had consented to take the part of the living skeleton ;

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he was to be painted black, with the bones showing in white, and threatened to present a very grisly appearance. The youngest Ffoulke, secretly urged by his brothers, had the impertinence to approach Mrs. Fullblos-somley, but his heart failed him at the last moment, and he limited himself to general observations on the subject of the bazaar, and a request for her personal presence and patronage, which the good-natured lady readily accorded, on being assured that the rooms would not be very hot.

Mr. Miller brought all the advertising resources of the Imperial Emporium into action, and the streets were paraded by men dressed as Knights Templar, who distributed leaflets.

Free admissions were accorded to such parishioners as disposed of three tickets, and the matrons of the lower middle class were secretly advised of the possibility of making cheap bargains.

James was assiduous in his attendance at the hall; he assisted in the draping of stalls, and in the effective arrangement of articles; but there was one stall at which his presence did not seem to be required. It was the pro-

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vision stall. The Miss Armbruster-Smiths apparently needed no help, and whenever he looked in their direction he was encountered by the scornful glances of Miss Vera Muncie, who seemed to have taken them in charge. The Miss Armbruster-Smiths being indispensable to the Miss Muncies, the quarrel between their respective mammas had quickly been patched up; the widow was not vindictive. Mrs. Muncie knew how to turn a quarrel to advantage; a note full of the humblest apologies had been followed by a tearful interview. The ladies had mutually pleaded guilty to quick temper, and condoled with one another on their respective temptations, and altogether the proceedings were of such an affecting nature, that Mrs. Armbruster-Smith had fallen on her knees on the carpet, and been moved to prayer on her visitor's behalf; and Mrs. Muncie went away feeling virtuous, rather exalted in the opinion of herself than the reverse, and full of good resolutions for the future.

But, alas! how weak we all are!

The first outward indication of a chastened spirit on the part of Mrs. Muncie was a visit

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to the vicarage ; she was used to be snubbed by Mrs. Ffoulke, and as a rule saw no more of her than was absolutely necessary for the social purposes of a mother with a family, but in her present state of moral elevation she felt a match for her. She wore an impermeable armour of self-esteem, and so looked in just to ask what was to be the subject of Mr. Cadwallader Pritt's next course of lectures.

Mrs. Ffoulke received her with stately gravity, and began to discourse of the different things that different persons had undertaken to do in the tone of one assured of success ; she incidentally mentioned the active interest of the Miss de Tallbois, who had not taken a stall, but were to fill their house with rich people for the occasion. She then expressed her regret that Mrs. Muncie and Mrs. Armbruster-Smith were no longer friends ; it made questions of co-operation so difficult, and Mrs. Ffoulke had entirely counted upon the Miss Muncies in assisting the Miss Armbruster-Smiths with their stall at a bazaar which was shortly to be held. "Mrs. Armbruster-Smith has promised to find us all the provisions," she added.

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"Oh, but we *are* friends, the best of friends, I assure you," said Mrs. Muncie.

Mrs. Ffoulke raised her eyebrows, inclined her head, and then elevated her chin slightly, as she said: "I beg your pardon; I must have been misinformed. I was told that there had been something of the nature of a personal quarrel between you at the meeting the other day."

"Dear me, no! At least, not on my side. I said something which Mrs. Armbruster-Smith took amiss, and at the time explanation was impossible; but she quite understands now. I have just come from her. My girls are devoted to the Miss Smiths, and will gladly help them with their stall."

"Ah! there is Mr. Howson! coming to see the Vicar, I suppose," interrupted Mrs. Foulke. "We see a great deal of him now. He really is a most energetic, useful young man. I do not know what we should do without him at this time: and Mr. Miller, of course: one must not forget old friends. Do you think he is after one of the Miss Smiths?"

Poor Mrs. Muncie! Half an hour ago she

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had vowed, and meant her vow, never to let her tongue run away with her again, but the instinct of imparting information, and a little more, was too strong for her.

"Oh yes. I am sure Emma Smith is in love with him. I saw it only the other day at the lecture, but it would never do, and Mrs. Armbruster-Smith has forbidden the girls to speak to him."

There was a momentary gleam in Mrs. Ffoulke's eyes. "Why would it not do?" she inquired.

"Well, you see, he's just a shop-boy after all," replied Mrs. Muncie; "though Mrs. Smith's father was no better; and they say she has money in the Imperial Emporium herself."

So Mrs. Ffoulke had heard, and after a little calculation of the amount of Mrs. Armbruster-Smith's income, based entirely upon surmise, the ladies separated, the one to tell her daughters that peace was declared, the other to meditate over the details of a campaign. Young Mr. Howson had been too much about the vicarage lately. He was far too handsome to be on intimate terms with

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Gwendolen, who was rather silly, and if he were to make love to Emma Smith, and her mother objected, there might be troubled waters ; and Mrs. Smith might be induced to take her way to some other parish after the bazaar.

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CHAPTER XII.

ON THE EVE OF THE BAZAAR.

IT was the very day before the bazaar. Belated damsels were arriving breathless with bunchy parcels at the houses of the stall-holders; or were delivering their contributions to the stall-holders themselves at the People's Hall. Some of these were already rehearsing their dresses for the benefit of very particular friends, and bevies of maidens giggled from door to door in the fashionable quarters of Doddersfield. The air of inner chambers vibrated to the burden of "Oh, how sweet!" and did you really make it all yourself?" "You must lend me the pattern." While on the pavements and in the lanes the cry was, "Did you ever see such a fright?" "Cherry colour does not become her the least little bit, but she hates to be told so." "It was all I could do not to laugh in her face!" "Oh, I must go and see her before she takes it off—come along, Louisa."

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The exclamations of young ladies are not to be taken seriously ; they are prompted like the linnet's song, by nothing whatever. Instinct teaches them to praise to the face, and deprecate behind the back ; for this is the shortest way to please the person addressed, and the fault, if any fault there be, does not reside in the nature of young ladies, but in human nature at large, which loves flattery of itself, and vilification of all else.

Mrs. Muncie was ubiquitous. Everywhere she praised, suggested, hinted at the surprising effects which would be produced by the costumes of Miss Alethea and Miss Vera ; though, to say the truth, the somewhat podgy figures of these young ladies defied the utmost efforts of art, and in kirtles, farthingales, and fichus they still remained what nature had made them, a couple of plump, undistinguished young women.

In the afternoon Mrs. Fullblaster-Ffoulke made a personal inspection of the People's Hall ; with an air at once critical and affable she paused in front of each stall, gave hints as to pricing, the kind of stock to be reserved for the third day, communicated the Vicar's

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last wishes on the subject of raffles, and contrived to intimate that, admirable though his ideas on the subject were, she did not altogether sympathize with their severity; indeed, that her eyes would not always be aware of what was going on under her nose. With charming condescension she pardoned the zeal of a skittish damsel from Cornwall, great at fortune-telling, who had been fetched up for the occasion, and who, seizing Mrs. Ffoulke's palm, predicted death by feather-beds in the approved style.

At the provision stall Mrs. Ffoulke made an unusually prolonged stay, for she was a notable housewife, and could not resist the temptation to show off a little before Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, who was seated amply on a large box in the midst of piles of plates, which patient Emma was tearfully dusting. Both matrons proceeded to give the poor child advice. Mrs. Ffoulke dwelt on the size of the portions, Mrs. Armbruster-Smith on methods of keeping hot, and putting away for next day. There was to be no nonsense of kissing-cups and selling tea thus beatified for half-a-crown to sentimental young gentle-

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men or larky middle-aged swains. After a time, seeing that Emma was ready to cry aloud, Mrs. Ffoulke took advantage of the advent of the other Miss Smiths to ask her to come up to the vicarage and inspect a special cake, which had been sent by her relatives from Manchester. It was of enormous size, and contained a mine of almond paste inside, as well as outworks of the same ; it was such a cake as ought to have been heralded into the town by a convoy of rejoicing medical men.

Emma had exhausted the requisite exclamations over the cake, for feminine humanity at its last gasp never fails with appropriate complimentary adjectives, and was sitting down to enjoy a cosy cup of tea, when there was a ring at the bell, and Mr. Howson was announced.

" Dear me, I had quite forgotten," said the Vicarress ; " Mr. Howson said he would call with some things from the Imperial Emporium for Gwendolen's stall ; I dare say you would like to see them ; they have such charming china."

" Oh, but I think I ought to go," began

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poor Emma, feebly ; " I am afraid mamma will be wanting me."

" Nonsense ! " exclaimed Mrs. Ffoulke, " your sisters are there, and you look quite as if you wanted a rest. Mr. Howson is quite a nice young fellow, and he will see you back to the People's Hall when he takes the things ; " and before Emma had time to explain or resist Mr. Howson was in the room.

After going through the customary formalities with Mrs. Ffoulke, James extended his hand to Emma with the easy air of an old acquaintance, and was surprised to find that she hardly touched his finger-tips, and looked away ; while he was wondering at this change of manner, the box containing the china was brought in, James unpacked it, and Mrs. Ffoulke went out to fetch Gwendolen. In a moment James was by the young lady's side. " Why won't you look at me, Miss Emma ? What have I done ? " said James. For a moment there was a silence, and then Emma suddenly laid her head upon his shoulder and wept. James's arm was around her at once ; he coaxed her like a child ; for he was very

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susceptible to tears, was James ; and before Emma knew what she said, or why she said it, she had told James how her mother had forbidden her to speak to him, and how unkind her sisters were ; and the tale was hardly out, before James had found out that here was a poor young thing, who was in love with him, and who suffered for it, and by the time Mrs. Ffoulke returned, Emma's tears were wiped away, and the young couple had arranged a discreet line of conduct for the bazaar, and . . . well, if there was no formal engagement between them, there were all the essential preliminaries.

The young couple did not walk to the People's Hall together ; James went on by himself, while Emma waited for Gwendolen. He hummed to himself as he walked, cut at the nettles with his stick, laughed aloud ; in the People's Hall, he all but pranced up to Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, he ignored her stony stare, and congratulated her on the arrangement of the provision stall as if they were the best friends in the world. Mrs. Muncie saw and wondered, and, drawing her conclusions imparted them confidently to other ladies.

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"Emma was engaged to young Howson, and Mrs. Armbruster-Smith quite approved."

At the last moment that evening the Vicar came in, loud and laudatory—he despatched the brass band with torches on their last round through the town, he shook hands with everybody, praised everybody, spoke with a confidence which he did not feel of the large takings of the morrow.

Then he went home, hot and feverish, and ate a large quantity of cold salmon for supper with cucumber; his appetite was stimulated by a letter from a noted music-hall singer consenting to give her services gratuitously at the *café chantant*.

Towards five o'clock in the morning Mrs. Ffoulke was wakened by an unwonted sound; in the first moments of drowsy recovery of her faculties she imagined that the bazaar was over, the money secured, the church extension begun, and the stone-saw hard at work beneath her window; once wide awake she perceived that the sound came from her side, and by the glimmer of the night-light discovered that the Vicar was lying on his back; his mouth was open, his hands were raised on

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the pillow above his head, his fingers twitched nervously ; all of a sudden he gave a sort of choke, his eyes opened, his mouth struggled to articulate sounds, he gasped, at last he said, " He 's gone ! " in tones of the deepest distress.

" Who 's gone ? " said Mrs. Ffoulke, reflecting in her soul that the Vicar should never have another chance of eating cucumber for supper.

" The devil ! " muttered the Vicar, still only half awake.

" Well, so much the better ! " said Mrs. Ffoulke. " And now, Theophilus, will you just be good enough to turn over on your side and go to sleep like a Christian and not keep waking me up with that awful snoring—never again, my dear, never again . . . "

But the Vicar was not quite awake yet. " Such an opportunity ! " he murmured. " I wish he 'd come back ! "

This was too much for the lady ; she seized her spouse by the shoulder, she gave him a vigorous shake ; " Now, if you 're not clean demented, Theophilus ! " said she, " just turn over and go to sleep ! "

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“But, my dear, I have had such a dream, such a dream. . . The devil . . .”

“For goodness’ sake let the devil alone, and me go to sleep,” cried the lady.

“No, but the devil came and offered himself——”

“My dear,” screamed the Vicaress, thoroughly alarmed; her mind was perpetually haunted by an anxious dread, lest the Vicar’s intellect should break down under the excessive pressure to which he subjected it.

“Oh, you need not be frightened,” said the Vicar, “it was only a dream—but still it is a pity.”

“For goodness’ sake, Theophilus, do speak out, and go to sleep again.”

“Well, my dear, I thought I told you. I dreamed that the devil came, and offered to be shown at our bazaar, if I wouldn’t advertise; and I explained that I must advertise; and he said that he was too well known to need advertisement; and I said that that could not be nowadays, everybody has to advertise, and at that he took the huff; said it was beneath him, and was gone.

“How he would have drawn! We should

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have made a thousand pounds a day," and the Vicar sighed.

"Yes," said the lady, "it is a pity we can't get him ; but then you know we could always dress up a curate!"

The Vicar smiled ; the idea attracted him ; then he sighed again ; "I am afraid it would not do," he said, "the papers would say we were trifling with sacred subjects."

"Bother the papers !" said Mrs. Ffoulke ; "I am going to sleep," and in a few moments the harmonious strains of a nasal duet pervaded the apartment.

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CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER THE BAZAAR.

"FOUR figures, my dear, it runs into four figures," joyfully announced the Vicar to his spouse on returning from the committee that had been engaged in balancing the accounts of the great bazaar.

"That ought to satisfy the Bishop, I am sure," said the lady; "he won't take any notice of the horrid things they have been saying in 'The Banner.' I do wish those people would mind their own business. By the way, what does this mean?" she continued, handing a note to her husband.

It was from Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, and intimated a wish to see Mrs. Ffoulke on a very important matter; when would that lady be at liberty?

"Oh, I suppose she wants to pay something additional to the curates' fund; she really ought, considering the amount of enter-

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tainment she gets from their society ; it is a great pity we cannot let them out at so much an hour for afternoon teas."

" No, Theophilus, I do not think it's that ; she was very queer with me all through the bazaar ; I expect it's about young Howson, he met Emma Smith here on Monday, and I think he proposed to her."

" Good heavens, Maria !" cried the Vicar, lifting both his coat-tails at once as he stood with his back to the fire ; " then she's off."

" Who's off ? Not Emma Smith ; she hasn't the spirit to run away ; or she'd have done it long ago ; for her sisters bully her shamefully ; I was quite sorry for the poor little thing. However, she did not seem to mind much, and I managed to let her have a few minutes alone with Howson, now and then, while the others were at the bar and she was washing up."

" Maria !" exclaimed the Vicar, with the fullest interjectional emphasis of which that name admits ; and then relapsing into the connubially familiar : " you've been and gone and done it, Maria. She'll go."

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"Yes, of course, she'll go ; but she was bound to go sooner or later, and we've got more out of her already than anybody else."

The Vicar was whistling gloomily to himself—he had set his heart upon a new organ, and the possible defection of this opulent parishioner was a serious blow.

"I do wish you would let that kind of thing alone !" he said, sulkily.

"I do wish you would speak plainly for once, Theophilus ! What kind of thing do you mean ? Surely not Mrs. Armbruster-Smith ?" replied the lady with suppressed asperity.

" You know very well what I mean, Maria ; meddling with other people's love-affairs, and all that. Here you've been encouraging a thing that Mrs. Armbruster-Smith can't possibly approve of ; she'll come and tell you so ; you're bound to lose your temper and quarrel with her, you always do ; and I shall lose my best parishioner." And the Vicar fretted in his shoes on the hearthrug.

"Theophilus !" said the lady, reddening, and gathering up her household things ; "I cannot approve of your tone ; it is neither Christian nor gentlemanly. I must go and

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speak to Gwendolen." And the lady deliberately and majestically left the apartment.

"Phew!" whistled the Vicar again, and mentally ejaculated, "I wonder what Maria's up to now. She's got some card up her sleeve, I'll be bound. It's quite clear to me that she means to quarrel with the devout widow. Perhaps she means to rope in the de Tallbois, and has to make room for them. She's a wonderful woman after all, and it's generally best to let her go her own way. I'll buy her a lace handkerchief."

Meanwhile the young ladies, such of them as had not kept stalls—for they, conscious of exceeding weariness and blackness under the eyes, were staying at home—the young ladies of Doddersfield were discussing the bazaar ; they remarked on the exiguity of the skirts of the skirt-dancers, on the forwardness of the fortune-tellers, who were suspected of making offers of marriage under the veil of their calling, on the absurdity of the curates, on the airs that young Howson gave himself, and the silliness of Emma Smith. Mrs. Muncie met them, complimented them all, and was rewarded by

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crumbs of scandal. All were sure that Emma Smith was dying for love of James ; and how cunning she had been, washing up plates and getting him to help her ! they would never have believed Emma could be so sly, and Mrs. Ffoulke helping her on !

Mrs. Muncie became virtuously indignant ; James had not washed up plates with the Miss Muncies, whose elaborate costumes had done very little for them, except that a half intoxicated young collier, mistaking Miss Alethea for a barmaid, had made honourable proposals of marriage ; eventually Mrs. Muncie felt it her duty to call on Mrs. Armbruster-Smith and give her a friendly hint.

She found that lady in any but a receptive mood. Allusions to the bazaar were cut summarily short, and before long Mrs. Armbruster-Smith begged Mrs. Muncie to make no further references to the subject, which was exceedingly painful to her ; she had not known what was going to happen ; her conscience reproached her ; she doubted whether she had not been concerned in the commission of much sin and wickedness—that skirt-

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dancing ! and the good lady turned up the whites of her eyes and shuddered.

Mrs. Muncie followed the new lead : was surprised at Mrs. Fullblaster Ffoulke, that paragon of discretion, making opportunities for flirtation. Mrs. Armbruster-Smith groaned : " Alethea tells me that she heard her invite that young Howson into the refreshment stall, and set him to wash up with Emma ; and you know it was quite dark at the back of the stall. Of course there was no impropriety, dear Mrs. Armbruster-Smith : there could not have been ; he is a very steady young man, and if there had been anything, I am sure Alethea would have heard of it ;" and Mrs. Muncie paused to observe her victim critically.

Tears coursed down her cheeks. " My daughter could not be guilty of impropriety, Mrs. Muncie," said the widow, in a voice that struggled to be firm.

Mrs. Muncie hoped she had said nothing to offend, she had only repeated what her daughter had told her ; " however, Mrs. Ffoulke would be sure to know the truth ! " artfully suggested Mrs. Muncie, who scented

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a quarrel with all its rapturous opportunities for private confabulation with the belligerent parties.

And James still walked on air : he beamed through the halls of the Imperial Emporium, he personally mounted steps, and hauled down boxes for customers, bursting to tell some one of his secret, and looking forward to stolen interviews with Emma ; for that young lady, in spite of much apprehension on the subject of mamma, or perhaps in consequence of it, had displayed a marvellous fertility in the invention of accidental meetings, aided and abetted by the sympathetic maid. When Sunday came, James had quite made up his mind that he needed advice, that is to say, that he must unbosom himself to a sympathizer ; and his thoughts fell naturally upon Mrs. Walton, whom he had continued to visit in spite of the exceeding wickedness of her Sunday afternoons.

But before Sunday, such a storm had burst over St. Faith's as the annals of that parish had never previously recorded.

Mrs. Armbruster-Smith had called at the Vicarage fresh from the suggestions of Mrs.

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Muncie, and the Vicaress had met her fresh from a difference of opinion with the Vicar. When two such bodies encounter, so highly charged with excitement, something positively awful is bound to happen.

Mrs. Ffoulke had appointed three o'clock in the afternoon to receive Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, and she was sitting at her writing-table sorting tracts for the waifs and strays when she arrived ; this occupation gave her the advantage of being seated in a higher chair than her visitor, who, she anticipated, would take a settee ; but in this she was disappointed, for the widow, on being ushered into the apartment, did not sit down, she remained standing ; the Vicaress looked at her interrogatively and provokingly.

"Madam," said Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, quivering : and her headgear, with all the little shiny things, rustled as she spoke : "Madam, I am informed that you have encouraged my daughter to disobey my orders." The Vicaress continued calmly interrogative. "I am told that you invited Mr. Howson to wash up with my daughter Emma ; I had forbidden her to speak to him."

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"My dear Mrs. Smith! How could I know that?" pleaded the Vicaress in coldly measured tones. "Why, he happened to call the day before the bazaar, when she was having tea with me, and they seemed to be very good friends; besides, I knew that he visited a good deal at your house."

"Mr. Howson visits at my house as many other young men visit, on parish business, for religion knows no distinction of classes, but he is not intimate with my daughters, and, with my consent, never will be, whatever may be the custom at the Vicarage;" replied the widow, waxing defiant beneath the cold scrutiny of Mrs. Ffoulke's gray eyes.

"As to what goes on at the Vicarage," replied that lady deliberately, "nobody has any right to express an opinion except myself; and you will pardon me when I observe that I cannot see any impropriety in Mr. Howson's being intimate with your daughters: he is in a very good position in the town."

"Position!" ejaculated the widow, "why he is only a shop-keeper!"

"We are all shop-keepers in Doddersfield," replied Mrs. Ffoulke, steadily, and cheerfully

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added: "but I trust none the worse Christians; and I am told, Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, that you are yourself interested in the Imperial Emporium."

"But he is the son of a village carpenter;" shuddered the widow.

Mrs. Ffoulke fastened her calm gaze upon her, and said piously and reprovingly: "a carpenter's son! the Founder of Christianity was no more."

"Nonsense!" cried the infuriated widow.

Mrs. Ffoulke started to her feet; she rang the bell. "After the painful irreverence of that remark, madam," she replied, "you can hardly expect me to wish to continue this interview;" and, turning her back upon Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, she proceeded to smooth down her dress in front of the fire.

The widow retired; she went straight home and cried for five hours in her own room, then rang the bell, ordered gruel, and went to bed.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEDE CHURCH.

IN a narrow street leading out of the market-place of Doddersfield, once the main thoroughfare, now abandoned by traffic on account of the steepness of its slope, stood the Bede House.

In the days of good Queen Bess there had lived and died one Antony Brown. In those days Doddersfield was little more than a market-place on a hill side among the moors, where, at fixed periods, noted cattle fairs were held. The father of Antony Brown, being the younger son of a small landed proprietor, had taken to soldiering as a trade, and had fought in most parts of Europe, where fighting was to be done. In the intervals of campaigning he had married the daughter of a notary in Doddersfield, a man whose modest establishment bore no relation to the extensiveness of his com-

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mercial connections. Antony was the sole offspring of the marriage. In him the strain of adventure which made his father a soldier of fortune took another line. Brought up by his maternal grandfather, after his mother's early death, he was in due time sent to London to be apprenticed to a Turkey merchant, a connection of the family ; and soon exchanged the counting-house and the warehouse for the less comfortable, but more thrilling, life on board ship. Fortune smiled upon him, and in middle life he was already a wealthy man ; his father, no longer fit for active service, came home and lived with him, soldiering not having found him any permanent means of livelihood, so that he was altogether dependent on his son. One day the pair were impelled to leave the comfortable house in Aldersgate, and revisit their country home. There they found an old man begging in the street ; he had been a companion of Antony's father in the wars. On being asked what brought him to so low a pass, he replied that he had lost all his money, and that he had no son. Antony took the remark to heart, and close to the spot, where the old man had stood bare-

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headed before his former equal and comrade, he caused to be erected, in after years, a house for the accommodation of thirteen old men, “to the glory of God and in dutiful memory of his good father, Thomas Brown.”

The establishment was liberal in its scheme; each of the aged brethren had a sleeping-room and keeping-room to himself; there was a common hall in which their meals were served, and a chapel. There were also rooms for two ecclesiastics, whose lives were to be given to comforting the declining years of the brethren. These Bedesmen were to be selected from those who, being of gentle birth, but by reason of misfortunes, and having no family to provide for them, were like to come to want; preference was to be given to such as had followed the profession of arms. Nor were there forgotten certain decent widow women, being childless and of good repute, who were to be charged with the minor domestic cares of the establishment, but who did not reside upon the premises.

In course of time the foundation grew rich beyond the expectations of its founder; a great part of modern Doddersfield was built

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upon its lands, and the surplus income after the old men had been provided for, and which was assigned to be divided in certain proportions between the Warden and the Confrater, would have seemed considerable even to a Lord Mayor of London in the days of Queen Elizabeth. A bishop cast his eyes upon the institution ; the Charity Commissioners were called in ; first a church was built, of which the original chapel formed one aisle, and the Warden became the incumbent ; next it was provided that upon the death of the then Confrater the office should lapse, and the income of that functionary be devoted to technical education, and finally it had been arranged that the whole institution should be swept away, to be replaced by model almshouses, with improved sanitation, and a middle-class school with nominal fees ; a scheme, however, which was not to be carried into effect before the demise of the present Warden. So much for the pious memory of the brave old soldier and his dutiful son.

Mr. Treherne, the Warden, was a high churchman of the old-fashioned type. He was a widower ; a fact to which he in some

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measure owed his preferment, as Antony Brown had directed that the Warden and Confrater were to be such “godly and pious persons as having no kin of their own would be the more instant in caring for the House.” Having an abundant income and much leisure he had devoted himself to perfecting the services of the Bede Church ; though the establishment was extra-parochial he had built, and supported a Sunday School, intended for the use of the middle classes, and which he used as the nucleus of a choir ; he engaged a good organist, and realized the perfection of an Anglican service.

The whole institution was regarded by Mrs. Full-blaster Ffoulke as an abuse.

James knew that it was Mrs. Walton’s habit to betake herself to the Bede Church every Sunday evening ; accordingly, he repaired in that direction shortly before six o’clock, and meeting her in the market-place, asked to be allowed to accompany her. Mrs. Walton looked a little surprised, but consented with her customary good-humour ; she was aware that to the congregation of St. Faith’s the Bede Church was a red rag, and in the

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middle of the general exhortation she was shocked to discover herself speculating upon the motive of James's unlooked-for attendance.

Mrs. Walton habitually occupied a seat in the aisle which had been the Bede House Chapel ; there was nothing very elaborate in its architecture, but its lines were good, and the windows were full of a pleasant mellow stained glass, in which were represented the arms of the Brown family, and the early brethren ; this gentle consideration for the pride of his poor old men having been expressly provided for in Antony Brown's will.

The Bedesmen still occupied their stalls, and formed a picturesque addition to the congregation, in their long blue gowns with gold braiding on the sleeves and collar, though some of them inharmoniously expressed their views of the musical character of the service by too audible snuffing.

James, in his present elation, did not notice this want of reverence, and the calm dignity of the service, in which everything was decent and in order, while nothing challenged the attention, was tranquillizing after the fussy noisiness of St. Faith's, where the congrega-

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tion never knew what was going to happen next; whether the preacher would be black or white, nor what particular stimulant would be the prelude to a collection.

By the time that the sermon came, James was too much enthralled to resent it, though to an ardent “fidelian,” as the Vicar, in his lighter moods, called his congregation, it can hardly have been palatable.

Mr. Treherne was something approaching to an orator, but conscientiously did his best to quell his oratory; he was afraid of the effects of a certain directness of speech into which he was apt to be betrayed in extempore preaching; he habitually bridled his tongue, and conscientiously wrote and read his sermons lest he should say anything to offend. But he did not always prove equal to this act of self-abnegation; he wrote and indeed he read, but sometimes, as on the present occasion, a fresh thought would arise upon what he had written; he would follow it out, and in a moment was off his legs, whirled away in the rapture of saying what he thought.

The recent doings at St. Faith’s had stirred his profoundest indignation; but he had

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contented himself with writing a temperate sermon on the subject of Mary and Martha, in which the application to the congregation of the Reverend Theophilus could only be discovered by the very discerning ; he had not condemned any course of action, but he had strongly approved the calm and contemplative Mary.

He alluded to the early Apostles, who, themselves declining to "serve tables," appointed subordinate functionaries for that purpose. He spoke of the religious life of earlier days, when men, imitating their Master, retired into the wilderness to pray ; when distant and secluded valleys witnessed the erection of works of art breathing the devotion of generations of pious men ; he spoke of Fountains, and of Kirkstall, and of matchless Tintern in the West ; he drew a picture of the part that the services of God should play in a religious life—the life of rest, of peace, of renewal of strength in the contemplation of the highest ideals, which have been vouchsafed to man ; and he suddenly contrasted all this with the Church of to-day, huckstering in the market-place, swaggering against the

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mountebanks, with her gang of singing men and singing women, her play actors, and her dancers, her drums and her brass bands ; boasting of her offerings, advertising her communicants, her courts forever ringing horribly with the scream of the money changers.

James stared ; Mrs. Walton looked distressed ; the sermon soon afterwards came abruptly to an end, and the service closed with the lingering music of Stainer's long Amen.

" Does the Warden always preach like that ? " inquired James : " I understood he was very cut and dried."

" Happily not," said Mrs. Walton ; " but he sometimes gets carried beyond what he intended to say, and, I fear, gives great offence. No one can be more distressed than himself, when he gives way to excitement in this manner. Of all qualities he sets the highest value upon self-control."

" It is a very fine service," said James, " but I don't see what good it does."

" Perhaps you are not competent to speak of the effect of the Warden's services," said Mrs. Walton ; " I work under him, and I know."

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“But I thought he did no parish work!”

“Not strictly speaking ; but there are many here who have reason to remember the Warden in their prayers. And now,” said Mrs. Walton, abruptly changing the subject, “will you forgive my curiosity and tell me why you came to the Bede Church this evening yourself ?”

James blushed and stammered ; he had wanted to see Mrs. Walton on private business, and in short——. Then the whole story came out : he was in love with Emma Smith, he knew she was very fond of him ; he wanted to marry her, but he did not like to ask her mother ; he was not well enough off, etc., etc.

“Have you ever spoken to Emma on the subject ?” said Mrs. Walton. James admitted that he had.

“And she has said that she loves you ?”

“Certainly.”

“Then if you can’t face her mother you are a big coward,” said Mrs. Walton, energetically. “Of course you must marry her.”

This was a new way of looking at things.

Eventually it transpired that Mrs. Walton was an intimate friend of Mrs. Armbruster-

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Smith's, of whose real kindness of heart she was well assured. On one occasion Mrs. Smith had been of great service to her; it was when little Billy was born, and kindly relations had existed between the two women ever since. Mrs. Walton habitually refused to be aware of anything ridiculous in Mrs. Smith.

Of the Miss Armbruster-Smiths, Emma was Mrs. Walton's particular favourite, and was in the habit of frequently running up to Dodder Cottage in the morning to have a chat and make herself domestically useful. Mrs. Walton was assured of James's good fortune; was quite certain that before long Mrs. Armbruster-Smith would come to talk matters over with her, and would be found kind and sensible; she ended by inviting James to come into supper, but he declined, on the ground that he must see Mr. Miller at once, and take him into his confidence.

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CHAPTER XV.

MR. MILLER AT HOME.

As soon as the sun of prosperity had beamed steadily upon Mr. Miller, he had purchased in the residential quarter of Doddersfield a recently-built genteel family mansion.

This domicile was possessed of all those improvements in the art of house-building, which modern science has placed at the disposal of the speculative investor in house property ; the roof positively bristled with lightning conductors, and ventilating pipes, which latter innocuously dispersed the sewer gas of Doddersfield in the upper regions of the atmosphere ; there were ingenious trellises to prevent the snow from descending all too rapidly from the roof ; there was a tower, or rather turret, suggestive of baronial magnificence, from which the contemplative Miller could, at his pleasure, survey growing Doddersfield and the adjacent landscape. Hot

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and cold water were laid on everywhere, and the kitchen range was an epitome of all the ingenious culinary contrivances to be found in the catalogues of ironmongers ; it was also the despair of Miller's housekeeper, an elderly personage, who crept and trembled, but supported existence by dreaming over the details of a revolt which never came to pass. There was naturally a small conservatory off the drawing-room, a lavatory off the hall, and a bath-room off the landing ; but there was no such thing as a hearthstone in the whole establishment, a tray full of dust and ashes smeared over with Portland cement adequately serving the purpose, in the opinion of the builder. No single wall had been properly finished behind the skirtings, or in any other place likely to escape observation ; there was not an inch of lead pipe in the house of an adequate thickness ; no door nor window fitted after six months' wear ; there was not a solid partition from the basement to the attics, and the mice that scuttled in the larder could be heard in the best bedroom ; moreover, the drains had been ingeniously conducted up hill to their junction with the

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main sewer. Of all these things, however, Mr. Miller was happily ignorant, and confidently furnished his house in the best possible style.

He bought a suite in leather for his dining-room ; an art suite in tapestry for his drawing-room, in which he arranged half-a-dozen chairs round a central table, while a couch and two armchairs yawned adjacent for his visitors.

There was a bookshelf containing a complete set of handsomely bound volumes of the "Family Herald," and the "Penny Encyclopaedia"; on the table lay the works of the poet Wordsworth, and other literature both light and elegant ; its crowning ornament was a huge family Bible, illustrated. Mr. Miller was in the habit of alluding with pride to his library.

He had also a smoking-room upholstered in horsehair ; on the table, covered with American cloth in a walnut-wood pattern, gleamed a case of spirit bottles, securely locked, the gift of a few admiring friends.

In the bedrooms Mr. Miller had resisted the modern tendency towards flimsy iron and

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brass, and reposed at night upon a solid mahogany bedstead.

The foreman of the Imperial Emporium reported upon the whole installation as palatial.

James was in the habit of calling upon Mr. Miller on Sunday evenings after church ; the housekeeper used then to bring in a tray furnished forth with the materials for a light supper, and, after a meal preceded and followed by an elaborate grace of Mr. Miller's own composition, adequate to express the thankfulness of a patriarchal establishment, it was their habit to retire to the smoking-room, and there, having put away Sunday, to consider the campaign for the ensuing week. Both of them were unaware of the fact that they did so, and would have been very much shocked had they been convicted of such a mundane employment on the Day of Rest.

James, radiant from his interview with Mrs. Walton, was greeted by Miller with more than his usual heartiness ; business had been thriving of late, James's department particularly well administered, and Miller had determined to take him immediately into

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partnership, and thus permanently bind him to his interests. He had watched the languishing decay of Longstaff's, now a limited liability company, and dreaded the possibility of being, in his turn, the victim of an enterprising subordinate.

As soon as the pair were comfortably employed in maintaining their equilibrium upon the horsehair chairs, puffing from long clay pipes, and moistening their inner man occasionally with whisky and water — for Mr. Miller had never been a teetotaller except in the interests of others, viz., Mr. Longstaff's young men — James opened his business.

The announcement that he meditated a change in his life at first startled Miller, who feared defection, but when the real nature of the change was revealed to him, he became sadly meditative; he did not, although he had contemplated the possibility of such a change, like the idea of losing his young friend upon whom he bestowed such tenderness as his nature allowed, and indeed had James been aware of Mr. Miller's testamentary dispositions, he might have regretted the toughness of his physique. After some silence

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Mr. Miller looked steadily at James and said, "And they were marrying and giving in marriage till such time as the floods rose, and the Lord rained upon them fire and brimstone out of heaven, and such things as have never been seen before, nor shall be heard tell of hereafter." He was under the impression that he was quoting Scripture. Then he relaxed a little, and inquired the name of the young lady. Upon hearing that it was the third Miss Armbruster-Smith, he slapped his leg vehemently, jumped up, broke his pipe, and shook James warmly by the hand. He made light of the opposition of Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, let James leave that to him ; he would soon put that matter straight ; and the evening ended in felicitations.

Notwithstanding, after James's departure, Miller walked sadly and meditatively for some time about the smoking-room ; he felt deserted.

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CHAPTER XVI.

MATRIMONIAL PRELIMINARIES.

ON Monday Mr. Miller sought and obtained an interview with Mrs. Armbruster-Smith. Such conferences, at one time frequent, had been somewhat rare of late ; for Mr. Miller's ambitious schemes had frightened the cautious widow, who had carefully reduced her interest in the fortunes of the Imperial Emporium to a mortgage upon its extensive premises, and one or two of the branch establishments in the adjacent towns. This was not altogether ill-pleasing to Miller, whose despotic nature did not readily acquiesce in the trammels imposed by the necessity of occasionally consulting even a sleeping-partner, though he was prepared to take James into partnership, relying upon his habit of docility.

Mrs. Armbruster-Smith had spent some agitated days, but her agitation had diminished after a morning spent in unburdening her soul

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to Mrs. Walton, who entirely agreed with her, that Mrs. Fullblaster Ffoulke had behaved with unpardonable rudeness. In this the widow saw a providential chastening, and admitted that, perhaps, she was being deservedly punished for having deserted the Wesleyan Connection, in which she had been brought up, and having attended the services of the Church of England, not—as she now feared was the case—from any change in her religious convictions, but from an over-worldly anxiety with regard to the social prospects of her four girls.

In the society of Mrs. Walton it was impossible not to be honest; the real significance of things declared itself, and Mrs. Smith had no shame in admitting to her friend, that being the daughter of a tradesman who had made his way up in the world from very small beginnings, she had no right to turn up her nose at poor James, who was acting precisely as her own father had done, and who, for the matter of that, seemed to be an unusually capable and well-conducted young man—quite presentable in any company. The chapter of James's merits once being

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opened, his character and prospects were soon presented in an extremely favourable light, and Mrs. Armbruster-Smith even ventured to hint, that it would be better if Mr. Walton spent his Sundays in a manner equally edifying, but was pulled up short by Mrs. Walton's intimation that nobody knew what Tom really was but herself, and that she would not wish him changed in any particular.

In consequence of this visit, when the next morning Emma went to her mother's room to ask her how she was, and bent over her bed to kiss her, she found herself suddenly infolded in a close embrace, and taxed with being a sly little thing ; in a very short time she left the apartment merrily tearful, her mother having undertaken to inquire into Mr. Howson's financial prospects.

Mrs. Armbruster-Smith never did anything by halves : having at first strongly opposed James's suit, she now equally strongly supported it, and was deep in the details of the wedding breakfast before she descended to her own. The other girls could not think what had happened to mamma, who was on

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the best of terms with everybody, and left her business correspondence unopened : they surmised something, however, when they were informed that Mr. Howson was to be received as usual, the widow having had certain misgivings with regard to him satisfactorily dissipated ; and Emma had to submit to endless allusions, some gay, some vicious, to which she paid no attention whatever, so happy was she in her own mind.

Of course, the Miss Smiths imparted their suspicions to the Miss Muncies, who reported progress to their mamma, who wagged her head over the mésalliance in every drawing-room in Doddersfield to which she had access. Full details of the engagement were soon in the mouths of all the matrons, and all the spinsters : the exact time and place of the proposal were shrewdly guessed at ; some fixed upon the back of the provision stall at the bazaar, where much might be done under the cover of the clatter of plates ; others argued that the engagement was of long standing, and that the important question had been asked and answered on the way back from an Extension Lecture ; others had been

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unwilling witnesses of suspicious circumstances in the teachers' room at Sunday School ; but the matter was set at rest finally by Gwendolen Ffoulke, who triumphantly demonstrated that the momentous offer actually did get made in her mother's drawing-room. This Mrs. Muncie refused to believe; Mrs. Ffoulke, she knew for certain, was entirely opposed to anything of the kind, and went off to interview the Vicaress, whose horror, when she was informed that such an impropriety had been perpetrated in her own drawing-room, was awe-inspiring. She at once wrote a note to James, intimating, that as he had abused her hospitality, she could no longer receive him at the Vicarage. In consequence of this, James seceded from all the parochial institutions of St. Faith's, and accompanied Mrs. Armbruster-Smith ostentatiously to a Non-conformist stronghold; and the whole feminine world of Doddersfield, down to the charwomen, talked incessantly of nothing else for, at the very least, nine days.

Meanwhile, Mr. Miller had interviewed the widow. She received him in a costume which was recognized by the domestics of Dodder

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House as the harbinger of peace; it was made of gray alpaca, and was furnished with such frillings only as are indispensable to express a proper horror of nudity; she wore a brown holland apron in front, adorned with pinking and white stitching; it was provided with numerous pockets containing pruning knives and scissors, and other articles necessary for horticultural purposes; on her head was a black straw hat of the mushroom type, surrounded by a ruching of broad black ribbon, with a bow in front and pendants behind; it was further provided with broad black strings to be tied under the chin and protect the ears; these, when the weather within and without Mrs. Armbruster-Smith was serene, were allowed to float carelessly over her shoulders; her equipment was completed by gauntlet gloves of washleather and a pair of easy old slippers whose elastics crossed in front.

Seeing Mr. Miller striding up the drive, she advanced from her rose bed to meet him, asked him to excuse the disorder of her costume, and proposed a walk round the garden. She opened the subject herself. She said that Mr. Howson was informally engaged to

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her daughter Emma, but that, of course, she could not sanction anything of the kind till she was satisfied as to his pecuniary position.

This made things easy for Miller ; he dwelt upon James's many and obvious virtues ; these had moved him to secure his services permanently to the firm, by putting him in the position of a junior partner, and if James were to marry Miss Emma, why, then Miller would be prepared to make more liberal arrangements than in any other case, and hoped Mrs. Armbruster-Smith might meet him half-way. He even became more confidential.

" You see," said Mr. Miller, " it is not at all probable that I shall ever wish to get married myself."

The lady looked arch surprise. " Why not ? " she inquired, " I am sure you are still quite young enough," she added.

" Because," said the gallant Miller, " I never felt any inclination to do so until this moment." And he took off his hat and bowed ceremoniously.

Mrs. Armbruster-Smith actually blushed, but quickly recovering her self-possession, demanded what was expected of her. Miller

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explained that if she would hand over to Emma her interest in the Imperial Emporium he would present James with an equivalent holding in the business. "How generous of you!" ejaculated Mrs. Armbruster-Smith. It was Miller's turn to blush. He deprecated the compliment; he had no relatives. "Poor Mr. Miller!" ejaculated the lady. He had more money than he knew what to do with.—The lady drew a long breath.—And he could not dispose of it better than by providing for the happiness of a pair of young people, to one of whom he was strongly attached, while he hoped soon to win the confidence and affection of the other. After his death . . .

At this point the widow suddenly flung her arms round the neck of Mr. Miller, and violently kissed him. His hat fell off into a rose bush, and its recovery enabled him to veil his confusion; but not to escape the eye of Mrs. Muncie, who was just arriving with Alethea and Vera to take the girls out for a picnic.

Unaware of the intruders the pair continued their confabulation; Mrs. Armbruster-Smith consented to the match, and it was decided

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to place the marriage settlements in the hands of Messrs. Tinkler and Tramp, an old-established firm of solicitors, whose respectability was represented by Tinkler, and whose activity was manifested in the person of Tramp.

That evening, on returning from the picnic, Mrs. Muncie went into her husband's study, detailed the strange scene that she had witnessed, and asked, in much agitation, what she ought to do.

"Hold your tongue," said the gentleman, looking up over his book and under his spectacles.

Now, that was a line of conduct which never under any circumstances whatever suggested itself to Mrs. Muncie.

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CHAPTER XVII.

NUPTIALS.

IN a few days the whole feminine society of Doddersfield was in a state of beatific commotion. An engagement had been announced, to be followed by a wedding very shortly. All wondered how Emma could : and again what Mr. Howson saw in Emma ; but all agreed to inspect the trousseau, price the wedding presents, and be present at the nuptials. No one was more strongly infected by the matrimonial miasma than Mrs. Arm-bruster-Smith. Each day launched her in a fresh extravagance on behalf of the young couple. Miller also caught the hymeneal contagion, and the pair were soon on such terms as would have been highly appropriate had they been two lifelong friends, whose children had satisfied the desire of their hearts by contracting an alliance. Whenever one or the other was seen in the street, tradesmen

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advanced smiling and obsequious to their doors, confident of custom.

And Emma, Emma the shy, the demure, the timid Emma, as a betrothed was quite another little creature. It was almost superfluous on the part of mamma to give strict orders that no one else was to enter the apartment in which the young couple happened at any time to be located, for Emma knew no shame in her caresses, and continued to hold James's palm in hers, or count his fingers, or pass her hand through his flowing curls, or play with his watch-chain, and ask him little questions, whether third parties were present or no. After witnessing one of these little scenes, the emotional widow would kiss both of her dear children, as she called them, but none the less remained furiously angry with Mrs. Fullblaster Ffoulke, whose wish to insult her she had truly divined, and resented with becoming vigour. She marched her whole family over to the chapel in Printer's Alley from whence she had originally hailed, and James went with them. On the question, however, of being married in church, he and Emma were firm. By Mrs. Walton's kind

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offices the ceremony was arranged to take place in the Bede Church.

Meanwhile, in distant Northamptonshire a very different ceremony was rapidly approaching : Poor old Caroline Howson had long been ailing, and latterly had declined rapidly, in a manner mysterious alike to herself and her neighbours. William said that she had never been herself since James had last been home, and admitted that though he was a good son in the matter of sending money and presents from time to time, it would have looked better in him to think of visiting his poor old mother now and again. "I doan't know as I've anything to complain of agin our Jim," the old man would say, "but it do look strange like, that he should not mind to see his mother, that sets such store by him, and always did, him being the youngest." But when Lady Brock urged and, indeed, commanded him to write and order James home, he refused : "No, beggin' yer Ladyship's pardon, that 'ud never do ; my son Jim 'as 'is business and things to attend to ; 'e's out in the world, 'e is ; and it is not for us simple folk as 'as stayed at hoam to be

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dictatin' to him, when, may be, we might be the loss of a fortun to 'im ; and 'is mother, though 'er 'eart's set on seein' 'im, would not vally 'is comin' if she knew as 'e were come at command like." Notwithstanding, when a few days later Lady Brock visited Mrs. Howson, and found her very much worse, she obtained James's address, and determined to write for him without letting his father know, feeling for the strong yearning of the mother.

At the same moment Emma was cooing to James at Doddersfield, asking him about all the days when she had not known him ; and James, while virtuously admitting in general terms that his family were very poor people, forbore to enter into details.

" I should so like to see your dear old mother," said Emma, pulling at a locket on James's watch-chain, her own present, and looking up into his face. She was kneeling by the sofa ; the attitude of adoration came easy to her. At once there crossed James's mind the vision of his mother beside Mrs. Armbruster-Smith : no, it would not do. " You shall see her when we are on our honey-

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moon," he answered, and formed a scheme of returning from the Continent via Nenford. Emma once married, would, he felt, be loyal to his relatives. "But could she not come to our wedding?" pleaded Emma. "There I shall be with mamma and the three girls, and all kinds of friends, and you will have no one but Mr. Miller to look after you." James intimated laughingly that he was quite capable of taking care of himself on that occasion; and besides, his father and mother were too old to travel, and his brother would certainly refuse to come. So Emma had to content herself with resolving to send a prodigious quantity of wedding-cake to Nenford, duly apportioned to Mr. and Mrs. William Howson and Mr. William Howson, Junior, and other members of the family.

But a storm was brewing for the unfortunate James at Nenford. Mr. Longstaff had not been ruined by the Imperial Emporium. He had taken advantage of its success to dispose of his business to a Limited Liability Company, on terms highly favourable to himself, though less so to the shareholders, who never received a dividend after the first

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year ; he continued, however, to live in Doddersfield, where he had many business interests, and hearing of James's matrimonial venture, casually mentioned the fact in his next letter to Mrs. Grange, who made inquiries when she next visited old Caroline Howson, and was distressed to find that the old woman was entirely ignorant of the most important event in her son's life. Other members of the Howson family were wrathfully indignant ; but the poor old mother was cut to the heart ; her health visibly declined. Lady Brock diagnosed approaching dissolution, and at once sent the following mandate, addressed to James Howson, Draper and Upholdsterer, Doddersfield :

“ JAMES HOWSON,

“ You are to come home at once. Your mother is very ill, and wants to see you. I am told that you are to be married. Repent of your bad behaviour, and then your children will not grow up to treat you as your present conduct deserves. Read your Church Catechism, Colossians, iii. 20, and Ephesians, vi. 1, 2, 3. LEONORA HORATIA BROCK.”

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This epistle did not have the effect that its writer intended. Why had none of his relatives written to say that his mother was ill? Who was Lady Brock that she should order him to go home? A few days before his wedding, James wrote to inquire after his mother and inform her of the impending event, but was careful not to mention the date. He had previously written a stately missive to Lady Brock, curtly begging her to refrain from communicating with him in the future, and intimating that his relatives were perfectly capable of using the penny post without the assistance and interference of strangers.

The dowager nearly died of this letter, being forbidden the relief of strong language by the exigencies of her sex and station.

And all this while the hymeneal hum continued at Doddersfield. Slight acquaintances, who wished to be invited to the ceremony, sent wedding presents to Emma with touching good wishes expressed in the most appropriate language. Mrs. Muncie sent her a neatly bound volume of Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book, and drew her particular attention to that sage

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woman's excellent remarks on the management of husbands and children. Mr. Miller for the first time in his life bought a bracelet. Its design bore mystic reference to old and new ties alike unbroken.

Those were the days of wedding breakfasts, and Mrs. Armbruster-Smith became perceptibly thinner in the agony of the preparations. These were naturally "on a scale of unparalleled magnificence," as the "Doddersfield Democrat" observed with its usual originality of phrase. In the end James got comfortably married in the Bede Church, though his mamma-in-law interrupted the ceremony by a sudden faintness, which was understood to be a suitable manifestation of an excess of maternal affection; but she happily recovered sufficiently to develop quite an alarming sprightliness in her conversation with Miller at the wedding breakfast, who, for his part, performed prodigies of activity and gallantry at the ball given in honour of the occasion in the evening. Mrs. Fullblossomley was there. She had appeared at the ceremony with an unselfish determination not to spoil darling Emma's wedding by looking a regular old

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dowd, and had heroically attired herself in a canary-coloured satin gown, whose multitudinous flounces were edged with white lace. The order for this, half-a-mile or so, had given an impetus to the decaying industry of Buckinghamshire. Her bonnet was surmounted with an enormous bunch of the brightest crimson roses that art could furnish, and in presence of which Nature despaired. Having exchanged this headpiece for an equally flowbersome wreath, she sat by Mrs. Armbruster-Smith at the ball, hoping that Emma had not been too happy a bride. "What do you tell me? Not a tear, my dear—not a single tear?" she inquired eagerly; and on being informed that Emma had laughed as she went away from her mother's house, foreboded disaster, wagging her head till her wreath slipped over her eyes.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HONEYMOON.

IT is needless to say that James spent the greater part of his honeymoon in Paris. If he had shown any unwillingness to do so, Mrs. Armbruster-Smith would have insisted upon it with the full authority of a mother and a mother-in-law. In those days it was barely respectable to be married without going to Paris. So Emma trotted along the boulevards, and bought presents in the Palais Royal, and took her meals in the street, and looked at the funny shows in the Champs Elysées, and clung to James's arm here, there, and everywhere in a manner which he soon felt to be needlessly affectionate in the summer temperature of the gay city. As he, however, bought her a bonnet, gloves, a fringed parasol, and a new silk dress, she felt that she was indeed blessed in an attentive husband. In return, by the aid of her own French, and a

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waiter who spoke English, she found out all the English services on Sunday, and proudly piloted her husband to every one of them.

Shortly before their departure on the home-ward road there appeared among the letters forwarded from Doddersfield an envelope deeply edged with black, and with the address written in a very faint ink squeezed up into the top left-hand corner. In a moment Emma rushed from her place to fling her arm round James's neck, look over his shoulder with her cheek against his, and ask, "Oh! what is it, darling?"

It was the announcement of the death of Caroline Howson, and a request from his father that James would attend the funeral. "Oh, your poor dear old mother! how dreadful!" said Emma. "I shall never see her now." And she sank down by his side, and rested her head against him, and began to cry gently. "Has she been long ill?" she asked. James continued to read; suddenly he jumped up; "It's too bad," he cried, "they've no business to write to me like that." There was a postscript from his brother as bitter as the spelling and punctuation permitted; why

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had he not come home when Lady Brock wrote to him? why had he not told his mother of his marriage? She had been killed by his hardness of heart, and William Howson did not wish to see his brother at the funeral.

“They’ve no right to make a murderer of me,” continued James.

“Oh-oh-oh!” ejaculated Emma; “How very dreadful! Do tell me! What have you done?”

James got up suddenly, and began to stride about the room; he was very angry with his mother for having died just then; it was just like William and the Nenford lot to make out that it was his fault. Presently he stopped walking, and took hold of Emma’s hand; “My dear little wife,” he said, “I must tell you something about myself. You must forgive me for being a coward. I was afraid you would throw me over.”

“Dearest!” interrupted Emma, “How could you?” and fondly kissed the hand that held hers, stroking it with her other hand, and then gently rubbing her cheek against it.

“Yes, I know I was a fool, and worse,” continued James. “But then I did not know

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you so well; and of course I was frightened when you did not speak to me." But that was mamma," again interrupted Emma.

Thus satisfactorily assured of the complete and full confidence of his wife, James told his story. He was the youngest son of William Howson, the village carpenter. "So that horrid Mrs. Muncie said," intervened Emma, again. "But I did not believe her, and it would have made no difference if I had." Upon this there ensued a little connubial fondling, and then James went on with his story; truthfully, except that there was no mention of Eliza Turrell; he dwelt largely upon his first visit to Nenford, and the treatment that he then had to submit to; of course he could not go there again after that; but he had always sent money home, and a great hamper at Christmas; his mother had never wanted for anything; it was true he had not written much; but then, what was there to say? His mother knew nothing about Dodersfield, and nobody seemed to care to hear anything about it when he was at home; "Horrid, cruel, envious people!" ejaculated Emma. The end of it was they concocted

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together a pious and consolatory epistle to old William, and then went for a drive in the Bois de Boulogne. James, however, continued in low spirits for some time ; his mother's death had been a shock to him, a shock which he could not altogether shake off, in spite of Emma's unshaken faith ; in the background of his consciousness the disapprobation of Nenford was more galling than he chose to admit to himself ; do what he would he could not help feeling the sting of his brother's remarks ; and though he chose to be offended, and, indeed, wrote a virtuously indignant epistle to William, not even Emma's full approval of his conduct made him fully at peace with himself ; while her consolations towards the end of the honeymoon were just a little boring. She would look at him fixedly for a few moments, when his mind perhaps had wandered to the Imperial Emporium and the complications of its business ; then she would kiss him clinginglly and say, " Oh, you poor old darling ! I know what you are thinking of ; but you must quite forget those stupid people, now that you have got your own little wifey."

While James and Emma were thus sipping

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the sweets of the honeymoon, a very good friend of theirs at Doddersfield was bidding farewell to all sublunary interests. Mr. Miller was seriously, dangerously, fatally ill. His exertions at Mrs. Armbruster-Smith's ball in honour of the wedding had been prodigious ; he had been the life and soul of the party ; the young ladies of course sniggered at that funny little old Mr. Miller, and made unkind remarks about him to their recently fledged partners ; but the widow beamed ; so did the maiden ladies with whom he pranced and capered, and so did Mrs. Fullblossomley, for he did not shrink even from the burden of that extensive armful, so bent was he on seeing everybody enjoy themselves, and on persuading himself that he was happy, in defiance of an overwhelming depression that had hung about him for days. The night happened to turn particularly chilly, and Miller, heated with his dancing, flung himself into the smoking-room chair on his return home to think over the day's doings, and get cool. The consequence was a chill, the symptoms presently indicated typhoid fever, and shortly afterwards there was a complication—pneumonia super-

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vened. Three weeks after the wedding it became known to Doddersfield that Mr. Miller was condemned by the faculty to death.

Feminine Doddersfield hurried about to discuss the symptoms ; all were agreed in condemnation of poor Miller's housekeeper ; if she had only known this, and only done that, and told him to keep in bed at the beginning, things would probably have been different ; but as only a wife can give orders, the inference arrived at was that no man ought to be without a wife ; on deducing this satisfactory conclusion the ladies would go home to make calves' foot jelly, or would call to give the unfortunate housekeeper advice ; who, poor thing, sadly resented having been supplanted by a trained nurse, of whose methods she expressed profound distrust to sympathizing visitors.

Naturally among those most concerned was Mrs. Muncie ; her reprobation alike of nurse and housekeeper was emphatic, and supported by details. She brewed beef tea, and insisted on bearing it to the patient's bedside with her own hands. It was a grey, chilly morning, one of those comfortless days, which often

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follow warm weather in early summer. Mrs. Muncie on arriving at Miller's house was told by the maid that the nurse had gone to lie down, and that Mrs. Robinson was with master, who was no better. "I will go up, myself," said Mrs. Muncie, "perhaps I can help Mrs. Robinson, I am used to sickness;" and she penetrated to the patient's chamber. The housekeeper was standing by the bedside, crying gently; in the bed lay Miller, ghastly pale, his unshaven chin, with its grizzly bristles rolled upon his chest, his hands strayed upon the sheets: suddenly his jaw dropped.

"It was awful," said Mrs. Muncie afterwards to a friend; "most embarrassing: I was never so taken back in my life. Of course we both ran for the nurse, but I never shall forget——"

"Oh, no—of course not—how very terrible," said the sympathizing friend; "but how could you have dared to go into the room? I couldn't have gone for worlds."

"Well, I had no idea how ill he was; it was very wrong of that little maid not to tell me that the end might be expected, and so I told Mrs. Robinson. They say he has left

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her quite a large annuity." And then poor Miller's testamentary dispositions were canvassed with the full licence of complete ignorance.

When the actual provisions of the will were made known in Doddersfield, the public astonishment was indeed great. After providing for the erection of certain almshouses, bestowing annuities upon his servants, and bequeathing small legacies to friends, he had left everything that he possessed to his partner, James Howson !

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CHAPTER XIX.

PROSPERITY.

MR. and Mrs. Howson did not return to Doddersfield till after Miller's funeral. In those days people did not telegraph rashly, and the letter announcing the sad event followed the young people about from one temporary resting-place to another, till it eventually landed on James's breakfast plate the day after his arrival at Mrs. Armbruster-Smith's, its news already old, and thrown into significance by the still more startling news which had succeeded it.

James was rich; not rich beyond the dreams of avarice, nor exempted from the necessity of working for his livelihood, but the possessor of a respectable capital invested in a flourishing business. The fortunate youth! The oldest established Doddersfield families began to take an interest in him; and cards were showered upon Emma as

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soon as she opened house in her new abode : it was not the genteel domicile of the defunct Miller, of which the sanitary weaknesses had been discovered after they had done their work.

Mrs. Armbuster-Smith had herself selected the dwelling, and provided the greater part of the furniture ; during the honeymoon she had worked hard, and little remained for Emma to do except sort the wedding presents. Her sisters were for ever in the house, advising, discussing, discovering, disapproving ; sometimes she cried after they had gone away, but controlled herself on observing that it vexed James.

Strange to say, good fortune appeared to have depressed that young man ; he took himself very much in earnest ; insisted on holding family prayers for the two servants, and offered up extempore petitions and thanksgivings, in a manner which moved Emma's admiration, and also fear. The arrangements connected with the inheritance necessitated frequent interviews with Messrs. Tinkler and Tramp, and James strode through the Imperial Emporium wearing his mourning with

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a preoccupied air ; the establishment trembled before him.

He erected a stately monument over the remains of Miller according to instructions contained in the will, and seemed to take a magnificent pleasure in superintending the operations. He consulted Mr. Cadwallader Pritt as to methods of investing his money, which would be of public utility as well as private benefit ; and followed the advice of that worthy, who indicated Building Societies as offering an excellent field for the energies of the philanthropic capitalist ; and who talked largely of co-operation as the social factor of the future.

A few months after James and Emma had started house-keeping on their own account a great revivalist preacher came to hold forth at the chapel in Printer's Alley, where Mrs. Armbruster-Smith and her family were now regular attendants. Hitherto James had not sought church membership, but on this occasion he startled the congregation by suddenly rising from his seat and declaring himself a miserable sinner ; at the close of the service he had a private conference with the

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preacher ; presently he was waited upon by two elders of the congregation ; he detailed his experiences—verbally, and in writing ; the elders reported favourably upon his dispositions, and he became a member of the inner circle of the chapel in Printer's Alley. So fervid was his zeal, so manifest his awakening, that he was invited by Mr. Tramp to accompany him on preaching expeditions in the colliery villages, and accepted the invitation. In the St. Faith's days he had often climbed into the pulpit when decorating, to Emma's admiration, who gazed and pricked her fingers with the holly. He was discovered to be both instant in prayer and vehement in outpourings ; he led the long drawling hymn-tunes, standing on a barrow or in a cart at the corners of streets. His melancholy wore off, he was once more jaunty and self-confident ; once more his beaming countenance won him favour. His reputation spread far beyond Doddersfield ; soon men and women began to come up to him mysteriously after the service to ask for interviews on a matter of very great importance ; they would trudge miles to see him in his office at

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Doddersfield ; all came on the same errand ; they wanted advice about the investment of their money ; the more part were eager to leave it entirely to him to do as he pleased with ; some would go away after depositing the savings of a life-time in his hands, without even asking for a receipt. James sought the advice of Mr. Tramp, who counselled him to guarantee five per cent. to the investor, and then place the money as occasion offered ; he not unfrequently himself suggested sound securities : he entirely approved of the Building Society scheme, and soon brought into being the Doddersfield Provident Building Society ; then the Doddersfield District Building Society, which were followed by the Swallow and the Pelican, and many other building societies, of all of which he was secretary, and James a director. Eventually a Co-operative Bank came into being. At the meetings which preluded the foundation of these societies James used to draw an enticing picture of the artisan owning his own house, and contrast it with the deplorable condition of the villager subject to the whims of an irresponsible landlord, who might be a brain-

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less sportsman, or a meddlesome, tyrannical old woman ; his descriptions of the latter personage moved laughter and indignation. He dwelt upon the fact that there would be no rent to pay, a statement which invariably elicited the cheers of his audience, who were free from sentimental prejudices against paying interest on a mortgage. He cheerfully foresaw a time when the people would again enter into possession of the land, and, excited by his own eloquence, proclaimed a general restitution of everything. He used to send his father copies of the local paper which reported his speeches ; these were passed from house to house at Nenford, and several of the cottagers lumbered uneasily out of the way on the approach of Lady Brock or Mr. Grange, not wishing to do the customary reverences to these dignitaries. When, however, James proposed to visit Nenford in person and preach on the village green, old William requested him to forbear till such a time as he personally should have no further concern in the affairs of Nenford : and James acquiesced.

During these early times of married life and prosperity, how happy was Emma ! For the

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first year of her marriage she had been an object of deep interest to the ladies of Dodersfield ; they had all called and approved of the drawing-room, admired the muslin curtains in which the windows were heavily shrouded, the universal frillings and plush. Each confidentially recommended her own medical man, apothecary, and monthly nurse. Mrs. Fullblossomley had strongly urged her from the very commencement to break her husband in to tapioca puddings, and other farinaceous concoctions in which milk predominated ; she detailed her own sad experience, Fullblossomley's direful example had armed the children against her and everything wholesome ; meal times had been a battlefield, discord had reigned where all should be peace and rational conversation ; the good lady deplored her own want of foresight in the early days of marriage ; her voice shook, and large tears rolled on to her black satin bosom.

Emma, dismayed, consulted Mrs. Walton, who laughed, admitted that men always did spoil children, but pointed to the sturdy stature of the young Fullblossomleys, and opined that

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they could not have suffered much from an erroneous diet.

In due time the family came into being, first another little James, then a little Emma, and so forth, all just as heart could wish. But somehow the elder James never seemed to have any time to attend to the children. They solemnly came in to morning prayers and kissed their father, but when they were old enough to stay to breakfast he had his paper, and his correspondence to attend to, and took little notice of them except to send them out of the room when they spilled their milk. Except on Sundays he was absent from the family midday meal, and seldom returned home till they had gone to bed. It is true that he never objected to expense on their behalf, nor to the permanent presence of the doctor in the house ; but, as Emma deplored to Mrs. Walton, what with his business, and his religious duties, they appeared to have no home life. Even she herself was forced to be away from the house oftener than she could wish, hanging on his arm at public celebrations ; the only share in his interests that was vouchsafed to her. Mrs. Walton comforted

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her by demonstrating that this was the price that had to be paid for prosperity, and confessed that since her Tom had become a rich man, she had seen far less of him than in the old quiet days when Dodder Cottage really was a cottage. When, however, Mrs. Armbruster-Smith intervened, and arrived one Sunday afternoon to lecture James on his duty to his wife, Emma took his part, and summarily dismissed the old lady in a condition of volcanic agitation.

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CHAPTER XX.

CULMINATION.

JAMES had been married some five years, when the local politicians of the North Ward discussed him. These pious citizens held their meetings informally most nights of the week in the clubroom of the "Jolly Gardeners," a highly respectable but unpretending hostelry at the corner of Scot's Road. There were two entrances, one actually at the corner of the road, public and apparent, another, less obvious, opening into a quiet thoroughfare which joined the busier street. Members of the club were accustomed to disappear not too obviously through this portal, whereby they soon found themselves in an apartment whose walls were furnished with a cushioned settle running all round the room, sundry small tables, match stands, and spittoons; notices of sales by auction hung on the walls, which were further adorned with the adver-

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tisements of purveyors of whisky, and with a portrait of a great and good statesman surrounded by an almanack and much printed matter belauding the wares of Miller and Co.

One spring evening when an east wind was blowing, such as sharpens the intellect, inclines the temper to asperity, and suggests to the weak human animal visions of places where there is a warm fire and an adequate supply of comfortable fluids, the gathering at the "Jolly Gardeners" was larger than usual, and the elections for the Town Council being near at hand, conversation fell, as it not unfrequently did, upon the qualifications of the eminent patriot who at that time represented the North Ward in the Municipal Council of Doddersfield.

This gentleman had been elected two years before when popular enthusiasm was running high on the question of sewage. There had been much sickness in the borough, something of the nature of an epidemic of typhus in the lower parts of the town, charitable persons had returned half-stifled and totally shocked from district-visiting. A meeting of rate-

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payers had been called, and the Rev. Theophilus Fullblaster Ffoulke had fulminated against the state of things that was going on "in our midst"; the working men became agitated, and protested against being required to see their children die before their eyes: even the small shopkeepers talked of questions of public utility: and as the North Ward was far from the scene of infection, and its property-holders were not likely to be inconvenienced by reforms, it rose in its masses and elected Dr. Jurmysiside to a vacant place on the Town Council. Engineers were consulted, reports drawn up, rival schemes were submitted to the corporation, and the learned doctor supported the most drastic. He did more, he took his mission in earnest, held public meetings, showed diagrams of drains with blue vapour, hideously and obviously unwholesome, arising from them, revealed the horrid things that wriggled in the water supply on a white sheet; in every way did his best to educate public opinion to an appreciation of sanitary questions.

"Heard old Blarneysides' last?" said a portly individual, who, having squeezed

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through the door of the club room, was proceeding with deliberation to fill a pipe. He was a dairyman, whose cows pastured on the Doddersfield Common in the summer, and subsisted on hay and roots in some byres at the back of a small street in winter.

"No, Mr. Skirridge, I ain't 'eard nothin', but I'm wishful for to 'ear," said Mr. Bulberry, a builder from the Midlands, who had migrated to Doddersfield in the growing days of the town.

"Well, he 's bin sayin' that court of mine where the cows is, is a horgan stable or somethink, but it 's darn'd unwholesome, whatever it is ; and it 's all to be swept away, and me and my cows may go to the devil together : leastways, in course he didn't say that—couldn't, you know, at a public meeting, but that 's about the size of it."

Several members of the party began to express views deprecatory of too intrusive an interference with the rights of property, a pious auctioneer wanted to know whether poor humans had any right to meddle with the arrangements of Divine Providence : if God Almighty elected to chasten Dodders-

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field with a plague, they must submit to it, and purify their lives.

"Oh, none of ye Psalm-singing here," interrupted Skirridge: "it ain't that neither; what I want to know is, is there agoin' to be any compensation? 'Ere am I to be cleared out of premises that's worth a hundred pounds a year to me, and who's to pay it back? My cows is wholesome cows, and always has been wholesome cows: you couldn't smell a country farmyard sweeter nor my byres; and here comes old Blarneysides with Tom and Harry after him, and says I dissembilates scarlet fever with my milk; it's a perfect scandal!" and the worthy gentleman's utterance became choked through indignation.

"Well," said a sharp-voiced little man, speaking quickly and clearly, "Jurmyside's not a fixture; we can get rid of him, the elections are coming on, let's run another candidate."

This proposal seemed to suit the general feeling of the company, which at once resolved itself into little groups, eagerly discussing the qualifications of various local notabilities.

In the course of the hubbub and ferment

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that ensued, James's name was frequently mentioned. "Can't stand him," said Mr. Skirridge to Bulbery; "he's one of the preaching lot."

"Oh, you needn't trouble about that," confidentially replied Bulbery, "Tramp's got him in tow, 'e'll have to vote as Tramp tells him, and Tramp's as much money invested in house property in Doddersfield as many that I knows on;" and Bulbery winked deliciously.

Presently one of the party got on to his legs and made a speech: he suggested that the company should form itself into a meeting to consider Mr. Nixon's proposal.

Mr. Nixon denied having made any proposal. "Get away with yer, Nixon," said Skirridge, "I 'eared ye with my own hears propose as we should run another candidate against Jurmyside."

Nixon again protested that his remark was not to be taken as a formal proposal.

"Never mind then," said Mr. Bulkington, the auctioneer; "I propose we consider the interests of the ward with reference to the coming election." A seconder was quickly

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found, Bulkington was voted into the chair, and the company arranged itself for a formal discussion, though Nixon loudly protested that its action was informal, possibly illegal, and that he for one would not be bound by any decision that it came to, whereupon somebody pulled him by the coat-tails into a corner and requested him to dry up his confounded jabber.

In due time James's name was formally put to the vote; it was pointed out that he would be an easy candidate to run, as all the Sunday School Teachers could be relied on to canvass for him, especially if they were allowed to wear rosettes. "Them young fellers 'ull do anything for a rosette," opined Bulbery; further James's connection with the Building Societies, and house-owning interests generally was felt to be a great point in his favour: it rendered him squeezable. His popularity as a speaker was unquestioned, and though of course he would have to make promises during his canvass, he would soon learn how to break them when once on the Town Council. Eventually a deputation was appointed to wait upon him, Nixon still re-

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fusing to come into line, so that Skirridge to Bulbery confidentially remarked over a final whisky hot that Nixon was a damned fool, that was what was the matter with him.

As the result of this meeting, and the mysterious hold which its irresponsible members had upon the Sunday Schools and public-houses of the North Ward, James was elected Councillor for that happy quarter : he did not disappoint his supporters by any undue urgency in the matter of sanitation ; he happily retained his popularity till he eventually became mayor, and when the buildings of the Doddersfield University College were opened, he entertained royalty at lunch, on which occasion Emma wore, for the first time in her life, a Worth frock.

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CHAPTER XXI.

NENFORD AGAIN.

MR. GRANGE was reading the "Times," comfortably attired in slippers, and slightly smelling of farm ; Mrs. Grange was writing letters and ticking off names from a list in front of her as she directed each envelope ; Miss Annabella was making up the accounts of the Parish Library.

Mr. Grange put down his paper on his knee and looked up over his spectacles at his wife. "Dear love," he said, "there's one person you have forgotten !"

"Yes, dear ?" said Mrs. Grange, continuing to write, "Who is it ?"

"Why! James Howson ; I see he 's Mayor of Doddersfield this year."

"What, James a Mayor!" screamed Miss Annabella : "Well I never! I should like to see him in his robes of office! And to see him meet Eliza! I called to ask after the

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baby this afternoon. It's a poor little thing, but the doctor thinks it will live now."

Mrs. Grange's features perceptibly stiffened.
"You know that he has become a Dissenter?"
she said.

"Oh, has he?" replied his reverence, "well then, bleed him!"

"What nonsense, mother!" cried Miss Annabella, "Of course he ought to give! Dissenters give to everything now; and it isn't as if he lived in the neighbourhood."

"Well, you can write if you please, Moulton, but I certainly cannot and will not communicate in any way with James Howson, Esquire," said the lady, with contemptuous emphasis on the last word. "To begin with, I should not know how to address him."

"I shall certainly write," replied the Rector, firmly: "Annabella, fetch me my desk."

In a few moments the Rector had indited the following epistle.

"DEAR SIR,

"As an old parishioner of Nenford I feel sure that you would not like to miss the opportunity of doing something for the vener-

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able parish church in which you were both baptized and confirmed, and where your family have worshipped for many generations. It has lately become necessary to restore the tower and nave. In order to preserve certain architectural features of great interest we have been obliged to exceed the original estimate, and are applying to old friends for help.

"I am pleased to observe from to-day's 'Times' that you are to be the first magistrate of your adopted town for the ensuing year. Pray accept my hearty congratulations, in which Mrs. Grange and my family join with me.

"Yours very faithfully, etc., etc."

The completed document was handed by the Rector to his wife for her perusal and approval, who deliberately drew her pen through the words "Mrs. Grange and," thus necessitating a fresh copy, to the reverend gentleman's great annoyance.

"What an unforgiving woman you are, Louisa!" he said huffily. "I am sure the man never did you any harm."

"He certainly treated my brother very

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badly, and out of respect to him I ought not to countenance Howson."

"I'm sure I never heard your brother complain! He always says that getting rid of that big shop was the best thing he ever did. And I am sure I agree with him. A shop, indeed!" said the Rector, and then, observing a certain red spot gathering over his lady's cheek bone, remembered the delicate and interesting condition of a favourite cow. He called for his overshoes and fled to the byre.

The result of the letter was a friendly note from James, inclosing a cheque for twenty-five pounds.

Some months later, towards the expiration of James's year of office, the reconsecration of the parish church became the topic of Nenford, and especially of the Rectory. The hospitalities consequent upon the occasion fell to the Rector's share, for Lady Brock expressed herself as too infirm to entertain a Bishop.

The list of subscribers was gone through, and all were invited to be present at a luncheon in the schoolroom after the ceremony.

Again there was a little difference of opinion

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when James Howson's name turned up. Mrs. Grange was for ignoring him. "We have his money," she said. "He lives so far off. There is no occasion to ask him."

But the Rector was firm. Eventually a compromise was arrived at, and an invitation was sent to the Mayor and Mayoress of Doddersfield. It was accepted.

On the eventful day, James, having spent the night at Northampton, drove over in his gown and chain. Emma sat by him in that ice-plant coloured creation of Worth's which had electrified all Doddersfield on the occasion of the royal visit, except Mrs. Fullblossomley, who thought it wanting in character, and would have preferred something more striking and more suitable to the occasion.

"Mother! mother!" screamed Miss Anna-bella, whose bedroom looked out over the front. "Here's James Howson arrived in his official capacity as Mayor of Doddersfield!" Consternation seized the establishment; what was to be done?

Fortunately, the Bishop, a prelate of infinite tact, had already arrived, and on being consulted, at once said: "Form the man into

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a procession by himself. Let the churchwardens conduct him into a seat first, and then come back for us."

This suggestion was accepted, but then there arose a graver difficulty—whom was he to take in to lunch?

"Of course, my lord, you will take in the Duchess, and as there is no other official personage here except the Mayor—he must take in Lady Brock," said the Rector.

Mrs. Grange collapsed into the nearest chair, Miss Annabella, utterly aghast, wailed, "Papa!" The Bishop stood by smiling. He inquired into the nature of the difficulty. He did not see how any other course could be adopted. Howson he knew by reputation well. It would never do to slight the Mayor of a place like Doddersfield, especially if he happened to be a member of a Nonconformist connection. The Rector astutely observed that as her ladyship's eyesight was dim, and her other faculties were much weakened, she would probably fail to recognize James, were he introduced to her as the Mayor of Doddersfield.

This seemed to be the best way out of the

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difficulty ; and in due course James got processed into a front pew, while Emma was paired off for the day with a volatile Arch-deacon.

Things went very much as Mr. Grange had surmised. Lady Brock did not recognize James in the Mayor of Doddersfield, and all went well till towards the end of lunch, when she suddenly turned to him, and looking at him along her nose in the old way said, rather tartly, " You are not the Mayor of Northampton ! "

" No, your Ladyship," replied James.

" I thought not," said the dowager. " He is my boot-maker, I know him quite well. He is neither so young, nor so handsome," continued the old lady, sprightly, and laughed happily to herself. Suddenly she stopped and asked him sharply, " If you are not the Mayor of Northampton, who in the world are you ? "

" The Mayor of Doddersfield," replied James.

" Doddersfield, Doddersfield," muttered the old lady, nervously rubbing her glasses, " What do I know of Doddersfield ? ah ! that 's where

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young James Howson went to—you’re not James Howson ?” she cried.

“ I am, your ladyship,” said James, looking very much amused.

“ Then you’re a very wicked young man,” said the dowager, raising her voice, and I often told your mother so. How dare you write me that letter, sir ? How dare you ?” and she was visibly choking with indignation, when the tactful Bishop rose. Grace was sung, and the party separated.

Afterwards James went with Emma to visit his father, who could say nothing but “ Well, well, now, who’d ‘a’ thought it ? My son James’s wife—and a finerer gownd than her leddyship’s.”

Emma was gentle and kind to the old man, who eventually led James aside to squeeze a bundle of bank notes into his hand. “ Put ‘em away for me, my boy, put ‘em away. You’re done fine and well for me with my money—put ‘em away somewheres as they’ll be warm ;” and the old man winked and grinned.

James, no longer wearing his official robes, walked round the churchyard with Emma ;

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as they stood by his mother's grave he sighed deeply. "What's the matter, darling?" said Emma. "Oh, nothing!" said James, roughly. "Come along, we shall be late for the train, and I see the fly waiting for us."

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CHAPTER XXII.

MR. TRAMP.

MR. TRAMP was a jovial little soul, he had been the pride of the eyes of his father, a retired tradesman, whose tendencies were genially religious; in his connection the preaching of extreme youth was regarded with favour, and "my boy, George," was encouraged to deliver himself before, at first, a select party, who met for prayer in his father's parlour, from whence his fame extended to the Sunday School; eventually the "boy preacher" was an acceptable figure in the smaller chapels in the locality: motherly women heaved and wept with effusion as he perorated, and in their enraptured wonder classed him with David and Samuel, and other young persons specially favoured by Heaven. At this time young Tramp was disposed to accept their view of his vocation.

In course of time the elder Tramp, who

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while unctuously lauding 'umility and 'umbleness, had an open eye to the distinction between a profession and a trade, and who was very comfortably provided with a competency, got him articled to the highly respectable Tinkler. Young George had been previously sent to a school at a watering-place conducted on the most satisfactory religious principles, and where were to be found, in the opinion of its Principal, all the advantages of an English public school without any of its dangerous tendencies ; there George learned just enough of the arts and sciences to pass the examinations required by the Incorporated Law Society ; he also learned to be rather ashamed of his reputation as a preacher, and discovered that the facts of life were not all as they were represented to be in his father's parlour. In due time he further discovered that it was possible even to smoke tobacco and otherwise indulge his natural propensities to pleasure without forfeiting the goodwill of the higher powers, and to pour forth edifying experiences at "class," while privately indulging in "temptations!" and he was not long in learning that there were advantages

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in being rich, which the unassisted light of nature had not revealed to him.

His ambitions on leaving school were limited to the acquisition of opulence, and if he had formulated his aspirations compendiously like Nelson, his motto would have run, "A million or Madame Tussaud's." For all this he neither quenched the spirit nor despised prophesying; he had learned the value of that kind of thing, and, once relieved of the animadversions of school-fellows, cheerfully returned to the prayer-meeting and the preaching-cart. In proportion, as the respectable Tinkler gradually withdrew to that leisure which was felt to be the proper reward of his long and lucrative public services, young Tramp gently pulled over his own sturdy shoulders the mantle of popular confidence, under which his chief had moved for so many years. Had all of his doings been as visible to the naked eye of Doddersfield as some of them, perhaps he would have had some difficulty in draping this garment about him. Business used frequently to take him to London at the period of suburban meetings, and he had not un-

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frequently been met in London music halls, and other establishments appropriated to diversion, by a small section of the Doddersfield business community, who lubricated the intricate machinery of life, and reconciled its conflicting claims, by adhering to the principle of "live and let live" as a general maxim, and "no tales north of Derby" as a more particular apothegm for the use of Doddersfield.

For all this, by the time that James Howson began to be a figure in Doddersfield society, Tramp had decidedly lost ground ; it was not that he was suspected, or that he did not continue to have large dealings with the property of the middle class, but somehow he was not employed in the manipulation of those big enterprises whose success places a man at the top of Fortune's wheel.

Without distinctly formulating it to himself, Tramp saw in James the complement of his own personality, for in Doddersfield nobody could have suspected Tramp of being a gentleman, even had his antecedents not been well known ; but in James's case, in spite of the revelations of Mrs. Muncie and

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others, dissimilarity from the world around him suggested superiority and invited confidence. Nor was there wanting on Tramp's side a certain personal inclination; the apparent tractability of James, which had originally won him Miller's favour, in the same way drew towards him the good offices of Tramp; and that gentleman found himself concerned in forcing James onward, and upward, content to rise along with him.

For several years the association, not explicitly stated, but sufficiently well understood, worked admirably, and its success was in no small degree promoted by the fact that James was at first very largely ignorant of financial business; in this way he lent his name frequently to operations, from which a well instructed rogue would have shrunk with horror, while the conscious dishonesty of Tramp sheltered itself beneath the ingenuousness of his partner; who for a long time believed himself genuinely to be working in the interests of the poor.

James had very early withdrawn from the active management of the Imperial Emporium. As his wealth and importance grew, the

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countryman's contempt for "a shop" woke up in him: he began to see himself prospectively a landed proprietor, and secretly resolved some day in that capacity to read a lesson to Lady Brock. Before, however, he attained that goal, the aspect of business affairs in Doddersfield began to change: the spinners and colliers went on strike, with sufficient frequency to ruin many of the small shopkeepers, and even damage the public-houses; the huge inflation of English trade after 1870 was followed by a contraction, the mortgages of the Building Societies began to fall in to an inconvenient extent, and the various securities, from which James had been paying five per cent. to depositors in the Co-operative Bank, under Tramp's guidance, no longer supplied the promised dividends; it became necessary to tide over quarter days, and Tramp's expedients, though effective, were not, as a rule, such as would have commended themselves to the approval of a British Jury. For many months after he first became clearly aware of the crooked ways of his adviser, James still inclined to virtue. It is true that he never definitely resolved to

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be honest, to realize his private fortune, and pay with that the deficits that were continually increasing in the accounts of the societies which he managed, above all in the accounts in the Co-operative Bank. He shrunk from that declaration of incompetence. But he forbore to help himself, and, however doubtful the expedients to which he resorted might look from a legal point of view, he was always able to say, with perfect truth, that if he hung on by illegal measures, these measures were taken on behalf of others, who had everything to lose by the destruction of his good name, and nothing whatever to gain by his confession of having undertaken to do what was impossible.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

TADDIE.

WHILE James was still serenely sailing before favourable breezes on the sea of popularity, there appeared in his family a mysterious personage called Miss Robinson. As a matter of fact, the mystery, so far as Doddersfield was concerned, was in great part the invention of Mrs. Muncie. The Howson children required a nurserygoverness, and Miss Robinson came to undertake the duties of that functionary. She acquitted herself in all respects with efficiency, discretion, and tact, nevertheless Mrs. Muncie was not satisfied. She had never been able to ascertain where Miss Robinson came from. She beguiled the children with sweetmeats, encouraged them to prattle, and elicited nothing. She promoted an intimacy between her own housemaid and Mrs. Howson's nurse with no better results. Emma herself, when questioned

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point-blank, simply stated that Miss Robinson had been recommended to her very strongly by a friend, and further than that Mrs. Muncie could not get. Vexation took possession of her soul, and when Miss Robinson's name was mentioned, she assumed an oracular air, and looked as if there were some things about which it was not expedient to be talkative. She not unfrequently asked Emma venomously how "her treasure" was getting on, till that poor child began to feel that there was something wrong in employing a nursery governess, and nervously consulted James on the subject. " You know, dear," she said, " it really would be better if I knew a little more of her, because then I could answer questions, you know. Of course, we have every confidence in Mr. Cadwallader Pritt, but it does seem a little odd, you know, having a governess on a gentleman's recommendation. Mamma knew all poor Miss Featherstone's family quite well, and her sisters used to come and stay with us." After five years of married life, James did not, as a rule, pay much attention to poor Emma's grievances, and used to allow her to talk on without listening, having discovered

JAMES; OR,

by experience that, as a rule, they evaporated in the process of narration, but on this occasion he pulled her up short. "There are two things to be done with Miss Robinson, Emma, one is to send her about her business, the other is to respect the conditions under which she came to us from Mr. Cadwallader Pritt, who expressly stipulated that we were not to inquire into her past, and so long as she does her duty by the children, I do not see what business Mrs. Muncie or anybody else has to interfere."

"Oh, I am sure I shouldn't send her away," broke out Emma, "I don't know what the children would do without her, and now that you are going to be Mayor, she will be so useful with your correspondence, and helping me with the table and things ; but it would be more satisfactory if we knew a little more about her."

"Well, I don't recommend you to ask," said James, "for the first question will send her straight out of the house, if she is anything like the woman I take her for." And at the dismal prospect thus opened out, Emma went away tearful and dissatisfied, but thought

VIRTUE REWARDED.

it no breach of confidence to warn Miss Robinson that Mrs. Muncie was no good friend of hers.

“Oh, that woman!” said Miss Robinson,—Emma perceptibly started—“I think I quite know the time of day with her.” And indeed, having quickly divined the motive of the very gushing attentions which Mrs. Muncie was in the habit of bestowing on her, she had amused herself with locating her reminiscences in every county of England, and all those of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, whose names she could remember, till Mrs. Muncie, baffled and furious had remarked, “You must be quite a wandering Jew, my dear, you seem to have been everywhere.” “No, only a Jewess,” replied Miss Robinson, and then checked herself abruptly, as if she had been guilty of an indiscreet revelation. This sent Mrs. Muncie off to Mrs. Armbruster-Smith full of anxiety for the souls of the little Howsons, and the result was a basketful of tracts published by the Society for the Conversion of the Chosen People, which Miss Robinson received first with complete mystification and then with fits of such uproarious laughter, that James had

JAMES; OR,

to be informed of the reason, and laughed in unison, till Emma began to show signs of injury, thinking that her mother was being treated with something less than proper respect.

It had not been long before Miss Robinson's sphere of usefulness was extended beyond the walls of the nursery and the school-room. It was she who organized the details of the garden-parties and other entertainments inseparable from the office of Mayor. While Emma was discoursing of difficulties, Miss Robinson ordered the tea and claret-cup, had the invitation cards printed : filled up, addressed and posted them. She placed the guests at dinner parties, had an instinct for precedence, prescribed the exact figure of magnificence demanded of the Mayoress on state occasions. The children were devoted to her, they corrupted her name, Ada, into "Taddie," and this soubriquet was employed by the household generally, and even by Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, after the explanation which had been led to by Mrs. Muncie's mistake.

Emma used feebly to wonder why the

VIRTUE REWARDED.

children were always good now; her own method of bringing up had been to forbid everything on principle, and to allow anything on inclination, with the happy result that as the boys became stronger, life at the Howsons' was a long alternation of entreaties and refusals, tears and concessions, eventually of threats and surrender; with Miss Robinson's advent everything had changed.

James had dropped unconsciously into the habit of employing her as a private secretary, and before long used to talk over his speeches with her. As business became more complicated he frequently consulted her on questions which he sedulously concealed from Emma, whose interjectional utterances were the reverse of helpful on occasions of worry. The year of the Mayoralty indeed, though outwardly one of prosperity, proved to be the first check that James had experienced. Men noticed that he looked thinner, and women deplored the over-pressure inseparable from the cares of public station; they wondered how Emma managed to get through with all she had to do, and that lady was not backward

JAMES; OR,

in wondering at herself. She hardly found time to visit her private friends ; she neglected Mrs. Walton, and wounded the feelings of mamma and the girls by ceasing to drop in at odd times.

VIRTUE REWARDED.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FINANCE.

SOME three years after the momentous day on which James had donned the robe and chain, he had been requested to meet Messrs. Bulbery and Skirridge at the "Jolly Gardeners" on business relating to the Ward ; these gentlemen had intimated that several influential citizens were anxious to have a little private conversation with him on matters affecting the public welfare, and had suggested the club room as a suitable locality. It so happened that James was a little over-punctual, and arrived before any of the party ; not having the clue to the private entrance he was shown by the landlady through the bar, and her own small room behind it, into the club room, where he stood waiting for the party ; the door into the front part of the house being only imperfectly closed. He had not been there many minutes, when he heard Tramp's cheery voice

JAMES; OR,

in the bar. "Are you there, Mrs. Floddon ? ah—I just came about the half-year's payment to the Pelican ; it 's due now, you know."

Mrs. Floddon had borrowed of the Pelican Building Society, and erected a small row of workman's tenements on the outskirts of the town ; she admitted the debt, but bewailed the prevailing depression ; some of her houses were empty ; the tenants of others were backward with their rent ; it was all she could do to find the money ; she was afraid she would be obliged to give up the houses.

"Yes—Mrs. Floddon—yes ; we're all like that, nowadays," said Tramp ; "but hold on a bit, that's what I say. Just you hold on. If you were to allow the Society to enter into possession, six months afterwards you would be regretting the loss of what you've borrowed and your own money that you put into the building as well. There 's the receipt; twenty-five pounds, isn 't it ?"

"Well, Mr. Tramp," said Mrs. Floddon, "here 's the money, though it 's hard to find, and I must say I'm grateful to you for being a good adviser to me ; it 's not your fault that the spinners have driven the trade away from

VIRTUE REWARDED.

Doddersfield ; though five per cent.'s a heavy interest to pay on house property, I'm sure."

" Ah, but yours is a special class of property, Mrs. Floddon, you see," replied Tramp ; " with the extra risk on it the Society's bound to charge high—thank you—" and pocketing the sovereigns, Mr. Tramp withdrew, having first partaken of a glass of something offered him by the grateful widow.

James listened and wondered ; he was on the point of bursting into the bar, when Mr. Bulbery entered by the club room door, and as he was speedily followed by other members of the informal deputation, their business quickly engrossed James's attention.

The next morning there was a meeting of the Directors of the Pelican, James happened to be the only one in attendance ; Tramp presented his pass-books, as secretary, with copies of receipts—among them was one to Mrs. Floddon—twenty pounds.

" You infernal scoundrel," cried James, " I heard you with my own ears take twenty-five pounds from the woman, and heard her complain of having to pay five per cent., when you know our rate is four."

JAMES; OR,

Tramp's colour failed for a moment, he sank into a chair, his hands dropped on his knees, then he pulled himself together, put them into his pockets, glanced down along his neat little legs to his heels; presently he looked up with a comical kind of grin on his countenance and twisted up his lips to whistle. In this way he kept staring at James for some minutes; then he put one hand into his coat pocket and produced a receipt-book, the counterpart of the one that he had just submitted for inspection.

"Yes, that's how it's done, my little dears!" said Tramp, pointing to a counterfoil, on which Mrs. Floddon's name appeared as having paid twenty-five pounds. "That's the way it's done; and the question is, what are you going to do next?"

Tramp had foreseen this moment; the actual discovery had taken him by surprise; but he knew it was bound to come sooner or later, and his course of action had long been prepared.

"Why, send for a policeman at once," said James, "and charge you with receiving money on false pretences."

VIRTUE REWARDED.

"No you don't," replied Tramp, "'cos why ? If I'm hauled before the beaks, there'll be lots of questions asked, which the ex-mayor can't find it convenient to answer. Why, you've signed your name to at least a dozen fraudulent documents in the last three months alone. There's not one of these Societies solvent at the present moment, and in the last two years, interest's been paid out of capital over and over : that's not legal, I suppose ; and your name's to every cheque that's been drawn. And then, how about that private banking business of yours ? That won't look well, when there's a flare up, and all the old widows and orphans come asking for their money back, and you haven't got it, and, what's more, don't know where any of it is. No, you can't afford to send for the policeman, you can't."

James drummed with his fingers upon the table, and looked steadily in front of him, at nothing. He knew that every word that Tramp had uttered was true, still it was obvious that Tramp was a rogue, and his features retained an unpleasantly severe expression. Tramp changed his tactics.

JAMES; OR,

"Look here, Howson," he began again, "don't cut up rough. I tell you I'm sorry, on my soul, I'm sorry I've let you in so. I never meant to do it; I meant to make your fortune for you, and my own too: I won't deny that; but things have gone against us every way for the last two years, and I'll be damned if I know exactly where we are; one thing's certain, it's no good chucking up the sponge.

"Why shouldn't trade look up again? Once get the mills started and we're all right. As for your Co-op. Bank depositors, get fresh loans to pay the interests on the old ones; things are bound to swing round again in twelve months' time, then you can realize your securities, pay off your depositors, and start fair. It's all in the way of business: there's many a man worth his million to-day who couldn't have faced his creditors times over. And what's the good of blowing on your own concern? You'll just ruin all these poor folk that have trusted you, while with a little patience they'll all come into their money again. The practical thing to do, and the kind thing to do, is just to hang on."

VIRTUE REWARDED.

There was a long silence ; Tramp got up and paced about the room, James continued to stare at the table. Suddenly Tramp flung himself on his knees at his side, and began to sob. "It is not for myself I care, I don't matter ; it's the poor wife and children. You can't be hard on them."

At last James spoke ; "I can't stand your taking that money of Mrs. Floddon's," he said. "That's regular thieving." This was an indication of relenting, and Tramp was quick to meet it half-way. "I'll never do it again," he broke out. "S'elp me Gad, I'll never do it again. But what was I to do ? I tell you I wanted the money, bad. I got damnably hard hit over the St. Leger, and I hadn't a penny to bless myself with. That's how it happened ; but I'll take my oath never to back a horse again, no, nor touch a card neither ; and I'll put it all straight with the subscribers, I swear I will. You needn't be so hard on me. Why, if it hadn't been for thinking of you, and the mess you'd be in, I'd have bolted last November." James started ; he realized that he was completely in this man's power. "Look here, Tramp," he said,

JAMES; OR,

"I want time to see my way out of this. Meanwhile I undertake to do nothing to hurt you. I always thought my private means were enough to meet all claims against me. I must look into my affairs." And he got up and went out. "Thank God, he's all right!" ejaculated Tramp, and proceeded to consider manœuvres by which James would be further involved, and a sufficiency of ready money assured to meet any emergency that might befall Mr. Tramp.

VIRTUE REWARDED.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE.

AFTER transacting his usual business for the morning, James, to Emma's great delight, returned home for the midday meal, but soon dispelled her cheerfulness by asking her to put his things together, as he was going to take a few days' holiday, with his friend Howard on his yacht. So Emma, not without plaintive protest, folded and stowed a suit of blue serge, in which James was wont to disport himself on the ocean. Howard was a friend at Liverpool whose acquaintance James had made in business. He had never transpired at Doddersfield, but short cruises with him generally from a Saturday to a Monday, sometimes longer, were of increasingly frequent occurrence in James's life, upon whom the anxieties of business had seemed to tell heavily of late, developing an irritability and moodiness which alarmed Emma. These symptoms had

JAMES; OR,

been coincident with the unusual stress of work entailed by the mayoralty, and had much increased since Miss Robinson had been unfortunately obliged, on account of ill health, to give up her position in the household. "For," as Emma explained, "her successor, though satisfactory in every way, was not at all the same kind of person, and was not equal to helping in the same manner with the correspondence."

Between Liverpool and Doddersfield it was necessary to change trains, and James, having secured a first-class carriage to himself, took the opportunity of putting on his serge clothes, so that he stepped forth from the compartment a fully-equipped yachtsman. He then took a cab, and drove to a small hotel near Water Street, where he inquired for Mrs. Howard, and being quickly shown up to a room was warmly greeted by no less a person than Miss Robinson. "Dearest Taddie!" cried James, and threw his arms around her.

Alas for Mrs. Muncie, that she had not temporarily exchanged places with the bar-maid, to whom a sentimental Boots confidentially announced, "The Captain 'ave

VIRTUE REWARDED.

come again ; " while that lady had replied, " Well, I'm glad of it, for, poor thing, she has taken on so, since he was last here; she 's been over twice a week."

Alas, indeed, for Mrs. Muncie ! Here there was a real, delicious, horrific scandal, which had been going on for three years under her nose, and she had never divined it!

Alas, for Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, who very soon after Emma's marriage had taken to looking astute when her son-in-law was mentioned, and had lately felt that there really was something wrong, but had never guessed the awful truth !

And still more alas for worthy Tramp, who was not aware of being in the clutches of a bigger rascal than himself.

From the moment that he had first heard Miss Robinson's voice James had taken more interest in her than in any woman he had ever met. Everything about her was different from the women who periodically encumbered Emma's drawing-room, and from that poor little lady herself. She did not strike him as being particularly beautiful, and yet she always challenged his attention.

JAMES; OR,

Before her arrival home had been dull and tiresome ; Emma for ever wondering, despairing over little domestic difficulties, making elaborate arrangements for the housemaid's afternoon out, and then reversing them in favour of the kitchenmaid or the cook ; the children endlessly bothering, asking for things, crying because they could not get them ; mamma-in-law descending upon the household at irregular intervals, and treating James with ceremonious politeness. Then at intervals there were solemn dinner-parties, at which you always met the same people, who always ate and said the same things ; even the pleasure of presiding at public entertainments, moving or seconding votes of thanks proved to have limitations. And, somehow, the religious fervour, which had reached boiling point soon after his marriage and his "call," began in a few years to simmer down. James no longer preached in villages, and his attendance at public worship, though no less regular than heretofore, had become a matter of form and habit. Occasionally fits of the old enthusiasm recurred ; a favourite hymn tune would stir the old associations, an impressive sermon

VIRTUE REWARDED.

rouse the old excitement; and then the fit would die away, and leave James wondering at the change in himself. At such times he would blame "the world," the absorption of business, but he did not on that account forego "the world," or cease to push his business.

Miss Robinson had given him a home. She had not been three months in the house before she had practically directed all its affairs, without ever appearing to interfere. Emma dropped into the habit of consulting her on all subjects, that is to say she left everything to her arrangement. The children ceased to be a nuisance, they were continually amused; lessons went off as easily as a game of hide and seek; and "the children's hour," from five o'clock to seven, became the brightest period of the day; everybody went into the school-room, even male visitors; there they played post, and musical chairs, proverbs, and hide-and-seek; before long they indulged in the licence of old maid: for Miss Robinson had no horror of cards.

Occasionally the younger olive-branches of the Walton family would be invited to tea with the children, and then they would dance Sir

JAMES; OR,

Roger de Coverley, and other country dances ; before long they had a dancing master in once a week, and the whole party learned to waltz.

Doddersfield was soon full of the virtues of Mrs. Howson's "Taddie," who became the life of its children's parties ; even Mrs. Fullblaster Ffoulke had condescended to invite her to tea, and had accepted her assistance in the organization of a Christmas tree for the benefit of the Infant Sunday School ; Mrs. Armbruster-Smith used to patrol her round her garden, and Tom Walton carried on an open and extravagant flirtation, to James's great annoyance, who clumsily endeavoured to alarm the jealousy of Mrs. Walton, in vain.

He even cautioned Taddie herself, who at first laughed in his face, "Oh, poor Mr. Walton," she said, "I am sure there is no harm in him ;" but when James continued to speak with increasing seriousness, and many apologies, of the tongue of scandal, so rife in Doddersfield, Miss Robinson thanked him for his kindness, shook hands with him, and withdrew suddenly, moist about the eyes.

From that time James did not enjoy peace of mind ; and yet he never was so happy with

VIRTUE REWARDED.

himself; away from home he would sometimes wake to the dangers of the intimacy into which he was falling, but as soon as he returned to the influence of the vivacious, capable woman, so frankly friendly, who seemed to wake all that was best in him, to brighten his intellect, make him talk as he had never talked before: who understood the conflicting claims of public life, and who had some insight into business, who even developed all that was good in Emma, and who was the ever good-humoured playmate of the children, his misgivings vanished; and he fully enjoyed the good fortune which had come to his house. It was not long before he found himself talking easily to Taddie about personal matters, which he had seldom mentioned to Emma. He talked a great deal about himself, about Nenford, and Taddie found the right words in which to admire his energy and success; she could laugh at Lady Brock with him; sympathize with his remorse over the estrangement from his mother. She was fond of literature, was Miss Robinson, not of that austerer literature to which James had been introduced by Mr. Cadwallader Pritt, but of poetry and novels;

JAMES; OR,

Doddersfield is not far from Haworth, and the proximity suggested "Jane Eyre," and "Wuthering Heights;" Emma used to listen with admiration to their talk, her own literary excursions never having gone beyond Archdeacon Hare's "Memorials of a Quiet Life," which found her occupation on Sunday afternoons for three years.

One evening, when the weekly dancing was in full swing, James came in rather late. "Oh, hurray, there's papa," cried the children, "now Taddie you will have some one to dance with."

"Certainly," said James, "I am quite ready, Miss Robinson, whenever you are."

The pianist resumed his seat, the dancing master arranged his couples, all was going well, when suddenly Miss Robinson fell with a cry of pain—her foot slipped over a marble dropped from the younger James's pocket. Her partner at once stooped to pick her up, and seeing that she turned pale, hastily lifted her on to a sofa in his wife's room, who happened to be downstairs at the moment, superintending the preparations for tea.

VIRTUE REWARDED.

"Are you much hurt?" whispered James, anxiously, as he slowly placed her on the sofa.

"Not much," was the reply, and then, suddenly, "Oh, don't leave me, don't leave me!"

James felt her arms around his neck, her cheek was pressed against his—"In heaven's name!" he cried, "let me go!" and as Emma entered the apartment he was kneeling on the carpet chafing Taddie's hands. Miss Robinson had fainted.

The doctor came, and professed ignorance of the exact nature of the injury, prescribed wet bandages and care; on no account was Miss Robinson to set foot on the ground till he had seen her again.

The sprain ran its usual course, Miss Robinson was for three weeks a prisoner to the sofa, which became a kind of throne of audience for the household.

James used to come in for a moment before he went to business, and inquire after the patient, who was not particularly responsive; in the evenings she avoided talking to him, and when the children went to bed, professing fatigue, had herself wheeled into her own room, and thus retired also.

JAMES; OR,

Meanwhile, James was consumed with passion. For the first time in his life he was thoroughly, hopelessly in love. He had left the sofa to rush in person for the doctor, and, having found that functionary, had walked off into the country by himself, half distracted. He believed that he prayed to be delivered from temptation, but whatever the words which his lips muttered, he still felt the pressure on his cheek, and Taddie, Taddie, Taddie, haunted him like a cry. He returned muddy and exhausted, two hours later, accounted for himself somehow or other, pleaded headache, and went to bed. By the next morning he was calmer, and Miss Robinson's cold greeting temporarily sobered him. There happened to be a good deal of business that day, and he flung himself into it with unusual energy. He was surprised at his own facility in checking accounts. In the afternoon he gave away the prizes at a Band of Hope athletic contest, and made a speech with unusual fluency and point. In the evening he returned quiet and, as he thought, cured, but Taddie's studied indifference set him off again. He had hoped that she would resume their previous friendly relations, but that apparently

VIRTUE REWARDED.

was not to be. He went to his own study, locked himself in, tried to think, but all thoughts went in one direction. "What did Taddie think of him?" He must know this, then he would arrange his life. She should go; they would have just one talk, one clear understanding, and then good-bye for ever! But even as he arranged the sentimental parting, there was the unbidden whisper, "No, she will not go! she cannot go! where has she to go to?" For Miss Robinson had no home.

To his surprise James found that his religious fervour suffered no chill in consequence of the turmoil which revelled in his breast; on the contrary, he experienced something of the nature of an awakening; the intensity of his petitions at prayer-meetings, the apposite use of metaphors applicable to the case of a miserable sinner charmed his fellow-worshippers. Occasionally, after a more than usually severe struggle with himself, he would make excursions into the country as of old, and preach to the colliers; words poured from his lips with uncontrollable fluency, ideas sprang into being in his brain uncalled for. He saw fresh beauties in nature, and found

JAMES; OR,

fresh phrases in which to describe them ; while his discourses on the subject of " Love " moved his audience to tears. There is something particularly affecting in the spectacle of a florid gentleman in a white waistcoat using a pocket-handkerchief. Never was the public admiration so high, nor its confidence so great. He even began to ask himself whether a passion so obviously favoured were really a guilty passion. How if Christians had been wrong in rejecting the polygamous privileges of the Old Dispensation ? Why should what was lawful for David be wrong for him ?

At last there came a day when, Emma having taken the children out to a party, James had an opportunity of interviewing Miss Robinson, now nearly recovered, alone. She was still lying on the sofa, which had been wheeled in front of the schoolroom fire. There were traces of tears in her eyes when he entered.

" Mr. Howson," she said, " are you going to send me away ? Do forgive me—if you only knew how I have suffered. . . ." And she broke down completely.

From that time James led a double life, and found it easier than he had anticipated, even

VIRTUE REWARDED.

though there came a day when Miss Robinson declared that things could go on no longer as they were. She knew the Isle of Man well, and requested James to set her up in a small house there. They found one a few miles west of Douglas. It was then that James began to go on yachting excursions with Mr. Howard ; that is to say, he took the steamer from Liverpool to the Island and spent two or three days with the so-called Mrs. Howard, whose husband was understood by her neighbours to be a captain in the merchant service.

This arrangement had lasted for two years before James discovered the delinquencies of Tramp. During those two years James had become a past master in the class of rascallities which his position made easy for him. Had he wanted any further instruction than the law reports which the daily papers gratuitously supplied to him, Miss Robinson herself possessed a genius for finance. Once embarked on a course of roguery James sped with all sails spread ; he exploited his recovered talent for preaching, his zeal in all religious undertakings was again at boiling point ; public confidence in him mounted, as his dishonesty

JAMES; OR,

increased. The easy going Directors of the Co-operative Bank placed their concerns unreservedly in his hands ; they even gave him signed cheques to fill up, when he intimated that some delicate piece of business required this arrangement. And in all this Tramp was the unwitting tool ; that worthy had fully intended to decamp whenever his peculations amounted to a sufficiently large sum to admit of it ; but luck had been against him, and whenever an unusually large sum found itself in his hands, he was certain to lose heavily over a horse race.

So when " Captain Howard " announced to " Mrs. Howard " how Tramp had been discovered pilfering, she at once cried, " Then we must be off ; if you have any ready money, dear."

" Yes ;" said he, drawing out a bundle of notes from his pocket ; " here's four hundred and fifty pounds—just think ! an old farmer from the moors, a close-fisted old villain that I've had my eyes on for the last four years, met me as I was on the way to the station, and put these into my hands to be deposited in the Bank : he did not even ask for a receipt. Did you ever hear of such a piece of luck ?"

VIRTUE REWARDED.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WALTON TO THE RESCUE.

THOUGH her husband did not return on Monday Emma was not particularly alarmed, she was used to some irregularity in the date of his return after a yachting cruise ; winds were apt to be baffling, said James, and a sailing vessel could not be expected to make her harbour with the same regularity as a steamer. So Emma went to bed, but not to sleep, listening for the wind, and occasionally falling into a dose to be awakened by dreams of shipwreck.

But when, on Tuesday morning, there was neither husband nor message, when the "Doddersfield Democrat" reported the weather in the St. George's Channel as calm and dull, and did not announce any yachting accident she became seriously unsettled, and went down to Mrs. Walton's to seek advice and consolation.

The two women were lost in conjectures

JAMES; OR,

and ejaculations, when to Mrs. Walton's surprise her husband came in and announced his intention to have lunch at home, as he had been unexpectedly able to get away from business. He comforted Emma by suggesting that probably James had found some important telegram awaiting him on his arrival at Liverpool, and had been unexpectedly called away to London or elsewhere, in which case news of him was pretty sure to arrive in course of the afternoon, even if he did not turn up himself. He advised her to go home and stay indoors on the chance that a message might arrive. "I often forget to send word, when I am kept away," said he, looking at his wife. "Yes, but you're well known to be a bad character," replied Mrs. Walton; and Emma went home more cheerful.

As soon as she was well out of the house Tom asked his wife, "Do you happen to remember when Howson first took to going on yachting excursions?"

"Well, not exactly," was the answer. "It was soon after Miss Robinson left—for I remember Emma telling me that he missed her help so much with his correspondence, and

VIRTUE REWARDED.

that she was glad he had taken to so healthful an amusement, as he seemed entirely over-worked."

"Ah—by the way—have you heard from the charming Taddie, lately?"

"I heard from Miss Robinson, Tom, a fortnight ago. She is living in the Isle of Man, near Douglas, Port something or other; she is staying with a Mrs. Howard."

"Well, I think you might have shown me the letter. I suppose she sent her love to me and so you kept it to yourself?" inquired Walton.

"I am sure she did nothing of the kind—her love indeed to an old fogey like you!"

"I don't believe you. Show me the letter."

"Certainly, if you particularly wish to see it—and to cure your vanity, my middle-aged Adonis;" and deftly escaping a threatened pinch, Mrs. Walton ran to her writing-table and fetched the letter. "Ah, Port Soderick, that's the address," she said, handing over the epistle with a mischievous smile.

Tom read the letter through with a perfectly grave face. "Well, I call that too bad," he

JAMES; OR,

remarked, as he handed it back to her. "I'll never flirt with anybody but my wife again."

"Oh, pray don't be so cruel to the other poor creatures," laughed Mrs. Walton, and prepared to run out of the room, but her husband stopped her.

"I really came home to have a serious talk with you. Something very disagreeable has happened with reference to our friend Howson. He went away on Saturday and has not come home yet."

"Well, that's nothing, as you said just now," interrupted Mrs. Walton. "By the way, why did you tell that fearful story about your not sending word?"

"That's just the point," replied Tom. "I did not want that poor thing to alarm herself unnecessarily, and it may be all right after all."

"But why should not Mr. Howson go away? He has often done so before."

"Yes, but he has not been in the habit of going away with four hundred and fifty pounds belonging to the Co-operative Bank in his pocket."

VIRTUE REWARDED.

"Oh, Tom, how dreadful! poor thing! poor thing! what is to be done?" said Mrs. Walton, placing her hands on Tom's shoulders and looking into his face. The action brought the water into his eyes, he kissed her quickly, and turned away to conceal it.

"Of course, it is possible there may be a mistake; it seems he met a farmer from up country on his way to the station, who gave him the money to deposit for him. The man came down this morning, and inquired about his money. His wife had been bothering him about not getting a receipt for it, and he would have come yesterday, he said, only he was not going to be put about by women-folk. Of course, Howson may have intended to deposit the money on his return, but it seems that little rascal Tramp has been to the Directors of the Pelican and made certain disclosures. I do not know what they are, but the magistrates have issued a warrant for Howson."

Mrs. Walton was sitting down, looking at the floor, her fingers clasped, and working nervously.

"What are you going to do, Tom?" she asked.

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"Well, I am going away for a day or two—and I am not going to tell you where. I am going away on business, and don't quite know where I shall be, and as you might be asked questions, it is better that you should not know either. I have an idea that I know this man Howard with whom Howson goes yachting—and perhaps from him I can get information which will enable me to find Howson, and get things cleared up at once. Meanwhile, if you could keep Mrs. Muncie and that lot off that poor little wife of his, and contrive that she should hear nothing till it is absolutely necessary, or comfort her if she has to hear anything, you will be acting like my own dear wife," said Tom, and bent down to kiss her forehead.

"Thank you, Tom, I understand," said Mrs. Walton, getting up, "and now I suppose I must pack you up. Are you going in those clothes?" Tom was wearing an ultra-sporting suit of tweeds, as usual.

"Yes, why not?" said he, crustily. "There's nothing wrong with them, I hope?"

"Oh, no, nothing, if your business is horse-dealing, or rat-catching, or—" And Mrs.

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Walton had to beat a hasty retreat from the room.

That evening found Walton at Liverpool, and the next morning he crossed to the Isle of Man. He found a chatty innkeeper on board who hailed from Glen May, and knew a Captain and Mrs. Howard, but had not the gift of description very strongly developed, so Tom could not be certain of his prey. On inquiring at Port Soderick for Captain Howard's, he was shown a little house on the top of a bank half a mile from the station and overlooking the road.

Walton, in his check suit, was an unmistakable personality, and Taddie, looking out of the window to see who had come by the train, at once detected him. James was upstairs packing—in a moment she had him down into the back regions. "Walton's coming up the road," she said. "Slip out at the back without letting him see you, go to the farm and hire Cain's dog-cart; I know it's not out to-day, for I said I should probably want it. Then drive along the Douglas road to the first turn to the left, and wait for me there. You may have to wait half an hour. If you meet

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anyone you know, say you are going to drive me into Douglas, and tell Cain so. Quick—I hear him on the path."

James hastily eliminated himself, while Taddie ground coffee to cover the sound of his retreat.

Walton had to ring at the bell for some time before the very youthful maid of the establishment appeared. He inquired for Miss Robinson. "She don't stop here," said the girl. "Mrs. Howard, then," said Tom. "Ah, that's missus! I'll go and ask her if she can see yer; she tells me to be very careful not to take strangers into the house, for fear of thieves and the like," said the youthful abigail, and departed, leaving the door wide open, and the treasures of the dining-room at the mercy of the suspected stranger.

Presently, Tom heard Taddie's voice : "Polly, go and shut that door—how often have I told you not to leave it open, when there are strangers about! go and ask him what his name is. You should have done that at once."

The girl returned to ascertain Tom's name, and slam the door ; immediately afterwards

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Taddie herself came and opened it. "Oh, this is indeed delightful!" she cried, warmly shaking Tom's hand. "You must excuse my precautions, you see my husband's a good deal away from home, and in the summer we have many queer characters about in the island; but come in and sit down, do!"

"Then you are Mrs. Howard!" said Tom; "I did not think you had been married since you left Doddersfield."

"Well, no—not exactly;" said Taddie, colouring. "The fact is—well, there's no harm in your knowing, I know you will keep a woman's secret for her. The fact is I was married all the time I was at Doddersfield."

"Indeed!" said Tom—"so there was a mystery, after all!"

"Oh, you mean that horrid Mrs. Muncie yes, how I used to laugh at her! Do you remember the Jewess?" and this joyful reminiscence put the two parties on the best possible terms.

"But why did you not tell my wife? I saw a letter of yours to her the other day, and you signed yourself Ada Robinson still. By the way, you never sent your love to me."

JAMES; OR,

“A married woman! Really, Mr. Walton, you are too shocking! But where were we? Oh, yes, I remember—why did I not tell your wife I was married? well, of course, if I had told anybody, I should have told her. But my husband is rather sensitive about the whole affair. It was a runaway match, and we really had hardly any money; then for a time he was without a ship, and we did not know what to do; fortunately, there was no baby. At last that kind Mr. Cadwallader Pritt offered to help me to get a situation as governess—I had been a governess before—till things should look up again, and in the end my husband was really obliged to consent, and so I came to Doddersfield; of course, as soon as he was able to find me a home, I came away. But he couldn’t bear the idea of anybody knowing that he had not been able to keep his wife; and so to please him I signed myself by my maiden name, as usual, and had my letters addressed to the care of Mrs. Howard. It was not very wicked, was it? Will the lawyers be able to do anything dreadful to me?”

“No, I don’t think so,” said Walton,

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and added chivalrously, "I wouldn't let them."

"Ah—I see you have not given up your bad habits, dangerous man! Do you know that you nearly got me into serious trouble, once?" inquired the lady.

"No—did I, really? I am sure I am very sorry," said Tom, colouring.

"Oh, don't blush—you've nothing to be ashamed of; you can't help being rather a—well, a bit of a lady's man, can you?"

"I hope I know how to show my appreciation of a fine woman wherever I see her," said Tom, gallantly, and with a meaning look.

"Thank you," replied Taddie. "But the worst of it is you have such a dreadful reputation at Doddersfield, that Mr. Howson thought right solemnly to warn me against you. You know his way." And Taddie produced an excellent imitation of James in his solemn moments for Walton's benefit.

"Well, now, let me see!" said the lady, "of course you will have something to eat—and you must stay to see my Captain. I expect him in every minute; he won't be jealous, you'll excuse me for a minute. I have only

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the little maid that you saw, and I must send her out to get some cream, for I mean to give you strawberries and cream, I am very proud of my strawberries." So Taddie withdrew, and shortly afterwards Tom heard her ordering the little maid to step over to Gwilliam's and buy a pint of cream, and to be very careful not to shake it on the road. He did not know that Gwilliam's was four miles off along the Castleton Road.

Taddie returned with a tablecloth, and soon had the table neatly laid for lunch. "I am so sorry," she said, "I cannot offer you a bed, for we only have one room ; this house is just a cottage. But I suppose you are staying at Douglas ? Dancing ? No, I don't quite class you with the Lancashire excursionist."

This reminded Tom of the object of his visit. He told Mrs. Howard the story of Howson's departure and of the lost money ; seeing that "Miss Robinson" was staying with a Mrs. Howard, he had hoped that Howson's yachting friend might prove to be one of the family. This was not an altogether ingenuous statement, but under the circumstances the only possible one.

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"And so you came to try and find Mr. Howson and warn him?" inquired Taddie.

"Well, yes—and no—if he had only made a mistake I hoped to warn him in time; if he really had done something wrong I wanted to find him, and urge him to return home. I should, of course, have offered to make things as easy for him as I could."

"How very kind you are!" said Taddie, with a queer look in her eyes. "Unfortunately my husband has no relatives of his own name that I know of—certainly none who can afford to keep yachts. After all, the name is not an uncommon one. Did you say those Doddersfield people had actually got a warrant out against Mr. Howson?"

"Yes—it is so—it certainly seems to me a little premature; but they say that that was due to certain disclosures made by Mr. Tramp!" explained Tom.

"A vulgar little wretch! I never could endure him. But I am forgetting your lunch. Where do you put up at Douglas, for I suppose you will hardly return to Liverpool by the excursion to-night?"

"Oh, I think I shall get back anyhow I

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can. My wife is much upset, and I shall get home by midday by taking the excursion steamer. They're a rough lot, I hear, but they won't hurt me." And Tom grinned knowingly.

"Well, as you will. Now you must excuse me for about ten minutes—perhaps a little longer—I may have to run into the garden to get some salad."

So saying, Taddie withdrew into the kitchen, where there was a sound of beating eggs; then he heard her go upstairs, doubtless to wash her hands and put on clean cuffs, he surmised. Then he heard her go out into the garden to get the salad, and then there was silence, a very long silence.

Tom waited, and waited—no Taddie appeared. At last it occurred to him she might be picking strawberries, so he strolled out into the garden to help, but he could not find the strawberry bed, nor his hostess. Could she have been taken suddenly ill in the kitchen? He searched again in the kitchen, again no Taddie—and no preparations for lunch; he ran upstairs; there in the neat bedroom was a half-packed trunk containing a well-known

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suit of James's, and on the wall a portrait of that worthy himself.

Tom turned hot ; he had never felt so hot in his life. He sat down on the bed. "Well, I am damned !" he ejaculated. Through the open window his eye caught sight of a man coming along the road from Douglas ; he ran down and hailed him. "Have you seen Mrs. Howard ?" he cried. The man made no reply, but walked up to the house. "Look here," he said, "who are you, asking for Mrs. Howard ? and who's been unpacking these boxes ? You're what I call a suspicious character, you are. There ain't no Mrs. Howards of your sort here—you should go to Douglas for them. You're a regular sport, you are. I know the look of the like of you, and you don't go out of this house till you give an account of yourself. What have you done with the servant lass ?"

It was in vain for Tom to protest ; the man had met the Captain and Mrs. Howard on the Douglas Road. When Tom heard this, he broke out into language which convinced his captor that he was a very desperate ruffian indeed, and Tom soon found that the alternative

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before him was to wait till the servant girl returned, who could give an account of him, or to be handed over to the Manx police, behind whom he vaguely discerned the awe-inspiring form of that dread functionary, the Deemster.

After an interminably long hour and a half the poor child returned nearly dead with fatigue, and corroborated poor Tom's story, who was then reluctantly released.

"What the —— do you look so fly for, if you ain't fly?" commented the irascible native of the beloved island.

Tom did not stay to explain his personal tastes in the matter of dress, but made the best of his way to Douglas, and home by the earliest boat ; it was true he had found out a good deal, but somehow he no longer had any taste for tracing James, and was chiefly occupied with the story he had to tell his wife.

Meanwhile James and Taddie were comfortably jogging along the road to Peel ; the latter laughed till she frightened the horse.

"I don't think you need have stayed so long with him," interrupted James, rather surlily ; and Taddie's laughter stopped short,

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"Is this man going to be my master?" she thought.

From Peel they took the train to Ramsey, where they passed for excursionists. Thence by steamer to Whitehaven, and so on to Glasgow. There they bought new portmanteaus, and a complete outfit. Taddie had the presence of mind to buy some rice. "What's that for?" inquired James. "Don't you see, you goose, we are going to take a honeymoon in the Highlands! the police will never think of looking for us among the tourists. In three weeks time they'll have forgotten all about us, and then we'll go to Liverpool, and ship ourselves to a South American Republic." So saying, she sprinkled the rice over their bundle of rugs, and contrived that some of it should be lodged in the folds.

All of this programme they successfully carried out, and enjoyed themselves immensely for a while. Meantime Walton and others were not feeling particularly happy at Doddersfield.

JAMES; OR,

CHAPTER XXVII.

FAREWELL DODDERSFIELD AND NENFORD.

By the time Tom Walton got back to Doddersfield the papers were full of James Howson and his escape.

The "Doddersfield Democrat" started with a large type heading in its Evening Edition.

"Mysterious disappearance of a Doddersfield gentleman."

To this was added the following morning :

"Defalcations at the Co-operative Bank."

And then again in the evening :

"Several Building Societies Involved."

And so on for several days.

Extracts from Tramp's confessions were printed ; his examinations before the magistrate fully reported, and then for a while proceedings were dropped. The affairs of all the Societies with which James had had to do proved to be in such a state of confusion, and

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so complicated with the interests of the Co-operative and other Banks, that nobody ventured to prosecute; as the first person to move might thereby admit that he, and not somebody else, was the victim robbed, and might find himself saddled with the whole loss. In the interest attaching to James many persons lost sight of Tramp, who insensibly contrived to pose as an injured character, a weak and amiable personage led into mischief by the authority and example of an unscrupulous superior.

So many cases transpired of persons who had handed over to James personally money intended to be deposited in the Co-operative Bank, but which had never reached its destination, that the magistrates felt that they had been right in issuing a warrant for his apprehension, and the well-known Doddersfield police were put upon his track. The activity of this imposing force was entirely mental, and their bodily strength was enormous. The Chief Constable of Doddersfield resembled in one respect the father of Frederick the Great; he had a mania for large policemen. Even height did not appeal to him

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unless it were combined with satisfactory chest and stomach measurements ; speed in a policeman, he said, was of no importance, what you wanted was stability. Nothing could be more absurd than a little policeman dragged at the heels of a lusty burglar. The criminal should be anchored to the guardian of the peace, and have no more hope of moving him than of stirring a house. As for catching a thief in the daytime, that would always be done by an active amateur before the regular official had time to get started ; whereas, at night, preventive vigilance was more effective than capture. When his giants had acquired sufficient circumference, and the unmistakable policeman's walk and policeman's stare, he occasionally dressed them in plain clothes, and employed them as detectives, with instructions to prowl. Three of these gentry prowled after James. They possessed clues, they knew the train by which he left Doddersfield, and the colour of his clothes ; they knew that he had worn a white hat. They traced him to Leeds on the evidence of the guard, where he had taken a fresh ticket : they traced him to the Liverpool train ; another guard re-

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membered putting him into it ; but he did not remember seeing him get out at Liverpool ; nor did the ticket collector there remember a gentleman answering to the description in dress or otherwise. The acute minions of the law inquired whether the train had stopped between Leeds and Liverpool, and found that it was possible to change at Rochdale into a train bound for Manchester and London. Clearly James had gone to London. All thieves do when they don't go to Liverpool. So the emissaries of justice went to London, occupying the whole of one side of a railway carriage ; they had a very good time there ; but they did not find James.

The consternation in the best society of Doddersfield was a thing lamentable to behold. Large-hearted ladies made jelly, and sent it to Emma, who, poor thing, could not be expected to attend to her children at such a time ; but all forbore to visit her in person, even Mrs. Muncie. They did not know what they should say. Mrs. Armbruster-Smith, much shaken in health, visited her daughter, and cried prodigiously, but Emma wouldn't speak to her. The police had had great

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difficulty in extracting any information from her, she had seemed completely dazed, and could not remember anything. Mrs. Full-blaster Ffoulke had written, offering a call from the Vicar, an infallible panacea, which she never failed to suggest with perfect confidence in seasons of trouble. Mrs. Full-blossomly sent an affectionate and pious note, in which the sentiments expressed did the author more credit than the spelling. Emma sat all day silent with the children, whom she refused to allow out of her presence, and who were terrified into obedience by her voiceless misery. At last, on the third day, she wrote a little note to Mrs. Walton, just before dusk, " May I come down and see you *alone* after dark "; and in the grey summer twilight descended, closely veiled. Mrs. Walton opened the door herself, gently led the poor child into her own room. " My dear," she whispered, " my poor dear girl! " and the women clung together. For the first time Emma shed tears. She came out of that room a stronger and a better woman. " I feel as if I had never grown up till now ; but I will be brave—I will—for the children's sake," she said, as she left

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the house. It was arranged that Tom Walton should call and talk over business matters with her the next morning.

That gentleman and his wife had held different views as to the measure of his responsibility. The lady held that James should be brought back to his wife at any cost. The gentleman reminded her that he would not be brought back to his wife, but to prison. The lady observed that in any case he should be separated from that other woman. The gentleman replied that Emma would probably be much happier in continued ignorance of that woman's existence. This theory the lady denounced as masculine and immoral, and the gentleman supported it as business-like. "To think of her having the impudence to correspond with me and Mrs. Armbruster-Smith all the while!" ejaculated Mrs. Walton. "That only proves what an out-of-the-way clever woman she is!" replied her husband. "I do believe you . . . you admire her yourself," said the lady. "My dear girl," answered Tom, "for me there is only one woman in the world." "Still, I am quite sure he ought to be brought back: he ought to be forced to

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pay back the money he has stolen from those poor women and children."

"That he certainly ought," answered Tom.

"And yet you know where he is, and won't tell anybody," protested the lady.

"But I don't know where he is; I only saw his photograph, which, under the circumstances, Miss Robinson had a perfect right to possess," urged Tom.

"How about the suit of clothes?" retorted the lady.

"My dear, light grey tweed is a very ordinary material for gentlemen's summer clothing. It is highly improbable that Howson is the only person who wears such a suit," pleaded Tom.

"I wish you would, instead of those horrid checks. At any rate, you must admit you were made a fool of," triumphantly asserted the lady.

"Yes, my dear; and you should be the last person in the world to wish to advertise the fact."

Thus the colloquy terminated.

On conferring with Emma the following

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day, Tom found to his great relief that James had left her money untouched. On retiring from the management of the Emporium he had placed in her hands all documents connected with her own private property, and as this had prospered under his care, she was not left very badly off. Tom had great difficulty in convincing her that it was not her duty to place the whole at the disposal of the relief fund, which was being got up for the aged persons and others who had lost all their savings, some of them all their means of subsistence, through her husband's dishonesty. It was eventually decided that she should go away for a while with the children, and then settle at Bedford, a place which offers singular educational advantages. Here she passed as a widow, and, her story not being known, received several offers of marriage from retired military men, who, by her repeated and unexpected refusals, were reduced to a condition of apoplectic amazement.

At Nenford, the news of James's misdoings first reached the Rectory through the medium of Mr. Grange's "Times." "So there's an end of your protégé, my dear;" he observed,

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as he handed the paper over to his wife and pointed at the paragraph.

"I am deeply grieved, but I am not surprised," commented Mrs. Grange, after perusal. "Think of the way in which he treated his mother!"

"And Eliza!" interrupted Annabella. That young lady made haste the next morning to call on Lady Brock, now bedridden, and report the delightful news.

"What do you say?" said the old lady, "James Howson run away with a lot of money? I don't believe it. I always said he'd come to be hanged—and so he will." There was no arguing with Lady Brock, who had to be left to construct James's bad end according to her own taste and fancy.

Old William Howson, on being informed of his son's delinquencies, a process which took Mrs. Grange nearly half a morning, as the old man professed himself very hard of hearing, made no comment, but demanded to be shown the papers.

He was found dead in his chair a few days afterwards, with a copy of the "Doddersfield Democrat" on his knees; leaving

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Martha Swaddell in despair about her burying.

For a time a wail of misery resounded in Doddersfield, the loudest wailers being those who had merely hoarded their money, investing and re-investing their interest, as they believed, in the Co-operative Bank. There was much real privation, much desperate anxiety ; but private and public help did much to soften the calamity to those upon whom it most heavily pressed. In cases of alleviable affliction Doddersfield was invariably good hearted, and often silently kind, nor in the habit of limiting its good offices to jelly and beef tea.

JAMES; OR,

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FAREWELL JAMES!

CAPTAIN and Mrs. Howard had a successful tour in the Highlands ; he shaved off all his beard, moustache, and whiskers, except a small tuft in the middle of his chin. This was Taddie's suggestion ; it made him look American, but, she reflected, fearfully common. They visited all kinds of interesting places ; she found that she gradually became bored by them : James proved to be a sentimental and guide-book tourist, fond of quoting the appropriate poetry under an umbrella, with his arm round her waist, instead of gazing at the sources of the poet's inspiration ; and, somehow, in a knickerbocker suit, he did not look either a sportsman or gentleman ; then he was appropriating and jealous ; on the whole, Taddie was glad when they embarked for New York. "It is much safer," she had observed, "to go to an ordinary place, by the ordinary route. It attracts far less suspicion."

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On board the "Aurania," Taddie was in her element again; the passage was a smooth one, and the travellers had plenty of time for dances, theatricals, deck quoits, and all other amusements with which the desperate tedium of a sea voyage is beguiled. Mrs. Howard was the organizer of everything; the Captain used to consult her; the male passengers thronged around her, the female passengers severely sniffed but publicly accepted her guidance, and made use of her powers of organization. Her chief ally was an ornamental cowboy, who, after exhibiting his prowess at Earl's Court, and his handsome person in the drawing-rooms of London, was returning with a well-filled pocket to a ranche out West. The pair were inseparable, and James was furiously jealous; the umbrella under which he used to quote poetry was now occupied by another person, whose literature of adventure was first hand, and of the most thrilling description.

James began to think with shame of occasions on which he had pointed out to his darling Taddie that a special Providence had marked them for one another, that she was his

JAMES; OR,

mate foreordained of heaven ; as for Emma, he had married her without waiting for a direction, without realizing the holiness and the mystery of love ; he had never really loved her ; he knew it now that he had learned what love was, and so forth. All this kind of talk seemed remarkably unreal, when Taddie was sitting in a deck chair with Dick Lariatt squatted at her feet, looking up into her face, obviously a hopeless victim to her attractions. By the end of the voyage Taddie had made up her mind that James was insupportable, his fits of sulkiness, of religion, of sullen jealousy, were odious ; when he remonstrated with her on the score of her flirtations with the picturesque man of the West, she declined to listen to him ; what rights had he over her ? she was not going to live like a nun, because he had chosen to run away with her ; if she was never to speak to another man for the rest of her natural life she would prefer to be done with him at once, for he was the reverse of good company.

On landing, the party kept together, all three went to the same hotel, and then on to Chicago, where Lariatt had business to attend

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to. They stayed there some weeks, James's despondency growing daily blacker, he longed to break his chains, but determination failed him; and then there was one very awkward circumstance. All his money had been invested in Mrs. Howard's name in different American securities. He couldn't touch a cent without her signature.

It had been his practice, whenever he made a big haul, to send her notes, and as soon as there was a sufficient accumulation of these, to make her story seem probable, she used to deposit them in the name of Mrs. Howard at a Liverpool Bank. She represented that her husband was a ship's captain, much away from home, that she was possessed of small house properties in various parts of the country, which she was selling as opportunity offered, with the intention of eventually buying a small hotel, and setting up with him in that business; meanwhile she re-invested in safe and easily negotiable securities.

One evening Taddie and Lariatt failed to return from an expedition on which they had started in the morning. The next day Lariatt returned alone; casually placing a revolver

JAMES ; OR,

within reach on the table, he thus addressed James. "Look here, pard—it's maybe as well to tell you that the game's up—me and Miss Robinson was married yesterday. She's told me all about herself and you, and I was to say how sorry she is that she ever helped you to do wrong. She says she can't stand an irregular life. It's been weighing on her conscience a long time, and she's been miserable; so you're free to go where you please. As for the money, here's a power of attorney regularly sealed and signed, enabling you to act for Mrs. Howard. Take what you like; you need not be afraid of me touching any of it. I could not be happy with it, for I don't think it's been fairly earned, and I've enough for her and me. As for rounding on you, don't think it of me; I'm not the man to do that. And now, good-bye—make the best of it."

So, saying, Dick Lariatt departed, leaving James cowed, but also indignant. Why should Taddie have treated him like this? All day he remained torpid, unable to think or act. Towards evening he decided to move further West, to some town smaller than this noisy Chicago, with its overgrown buildings.

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On the cars he found a pious company of farmers and their families, bound for a camp-meeting: he fraternized with them, accompanied them. Again the atmosphere of religious emotion caught hold of him; he was one of the first to declare himself saved, to mount the penitent's bench and pour forth a flood of confessions so deeply involved in metaphor, that he might have committed anything from blasphemy to manslaughter. His anguish was so intense, his language so moving, that a motherly farmer's wife made her way to him and did her best to console him. She and her husband offered him the hospitality of their home. James went with them; he began to see his way clearly now. He had sinned grievously, he had been punished, severely punished, for his transgression, and by means of his transgression. He wrote a long letter to Emma, begging for her forgiveness, and asking her to join him in America. He sent it under cover of one to Walton, full of contrite phrases.

Mrs. Walton was delighted, but when her husband pointed out to her that nothing was said about restitution of the stolen money, she

JAMES; OR,

submitted to his suggestion, that he should go and talk matters over with Emma. He did so—she was much moved by the letter, and was for starting for America at once. Tom told her all that he suspected and all that he knew of Miss Robinson, and proved that the man was not to be trusted. He pointed out the risks that the children ran, and the result was that Emma wrote a firm letter declining to leave England.

James, having realized what he could on the securities standing in the name of Mrs. Howard, and considering himself absolved by Emma's action of any tie connecting him with her, married the farmer's daughter, and took to agriculture. His walk is now considered one of the most edifying in the State of Illinois.

As for Mrs. Lariatt, for a few weeks she was enraptured with ranching, but then found solitude extremely dull. She had no longer the interest of an unending intrigue to occupy her mind, as in the equally lonely Isle of Man days. She soon persuaded Dick to sell off his stock, and start a saloon in a city more renowned for its gaiety than the strictness of

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its morality. Here business throve well for a year or two, and Mrs. Lariatt enjoyed a well-deserved popularity, till one warm afternoon Dick shot first a customer, then his wife, and lastly himself, thereby largely promoting the sale of the local papers.

Doddersfield is still Doddersfield, but Mrs. Armbruster-Smith is no longer what she was. It is a great trouble to her not to be able wholly to like her grandchildren.

Mr. Ffoulke is meditating a parochial circus on a grand scale wherewith to provide funds for completing the steeple of St. Faith's; and Mrs. Ffoulke is still omnipotent in the parish which she hopes shortly to exchange for a bishopric.

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